NEW
NICK CARTER WEEKLY

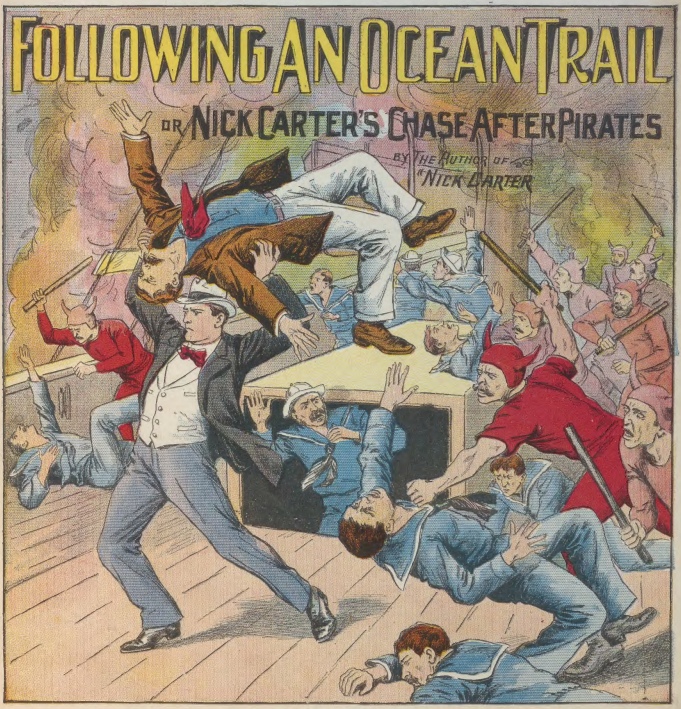
Issued Weekly. By subscription $2.50 per year. Entered as Second-class Matter at the N. Y. Post Office, by STREET & SMITH, *79-89 Seventh Ave., N. Y.*

No. 498 NEW YORK, JULY 14, 1906. **Price, Five Cents**

FOLLOWING AN OCEAN TRAIL

OR, NICK CARTER'S CHASE AFTER PIRATES

BY THE AUTHOR OF "NICK CARTER"



Nick lifted the man from his feet, raised him high into the air, and dashed him down upon the deck with a sickening thud which sounded above the other noises of the strange battle.

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FOLLOWING AN OCEAN TRAIL;

OR,

Nick Carter's Chase After Pirates.

Edited by CHICKERING CARTER.

CHAPTER I.

AN ACT OF PIRACY.

The case of the mysterious smugglers—annotated in the editor's journal under the head of "The Black Flag of Piracy"—being disposed of, an uneventful week for Nick Carter succeeded it.

Chick had been sent to Paris on one of the old "hang-fire" cases that had lingered in the care of the detective for a long time. Ten-Ichi was in Mexico, and Patsy was on his way to California. Even Joseph was momentarily out when shortly after ten o'clock one morning, the bell at Nick Carter's house began to ring, and kept on ringing until the detective opened the door.

The detective had calculated upon administering a sharp reproof to the man at the door, as soon as he should open it, but when he discovered who it was that had kept the electric button pressed in as far as it would go, his annoyance was changed to surprise.

The man on the door-step was Captain Parker, of the *Nadja*—Nick Carter's own private yacht, concerning which the readers of Nick Carter histories are already well informed.

The appearance of Captain Parker was sufficient to have caused the surprise, for he was disheveled and unkempt; he was pale and haggard; there were traces of blood which had been hastily and not too carefully washed away, on one side of his face, suggesting that he had received a blow on his head which had caused it to flow; he was plainly excited, and there was also a dangerous gleam of anger in his sky-blue eyes.

More than that, his clothing was torn and soiled, and altogether he looked quite unlike the usually spotlessly clean and well-groomed captain.

"What in the world has happened to you?" exclaimed the detective, opening the door as wide as it would go to permit him to enter.

"Let me in, sir, and give me a drink of something to brace me up a bit, then let me catch my breath, and I will tell you all about it," was the reply.

The detective conducted the captain to the sideboard in the dining-room and told him to help himself. After

that he sent him to the bathroom and told him to get into the tub, and that while he was there a change of clothing throughout would be sent to him.

"We can wait until you are yourself again, Parker, for the story," he said. "I don't suppose there will be any bones broken in the meantime, will there?"

"No, sir. The story can wait that long; and, perhaps, I can tell it better after I have cleaned up a bit," was the reply.

And so it was half an hour after the captain's arrival at the house before he and the detective were seated together in the study where Nick had told Parker he would wait for him.

"Now," said the detective, when the captain entered the room, "give me the principal fact first, and we will go into particulars afterward. What has happened?"

"The *Nadja* has been stolen. She is now somewhere at sea, and the men who stole her are those same five devils who were the ringleaders of the smugglers—you know."

"You mean Murray, Hadley, Russel, Cadillac, and Marston, don't you?" asked Nick.

"Yes, sir. Those five."

"And you mean to assure me that they have escaped from the United States authorities, are now at liberty, and that they have stolen my yacht, the *Nadja?*"

"Just that. No more. No less."

"When was it done?"

"Last night; just before midnight. About seven bells, to the best of my judgment."

"How was it done?"

"Well, sir, they just came aboard and did it. I suspect that they pumped chloroform into the fo'castle and into my cabin after they had overpowered the watch, sir. Anyhow, I didn't know a thing about what had happened until I came to my senses with the knowledge that we were under weigh. You see, I could hear the engines throbbing, and I could feel the motion of the yacht."

"And where yere you, then?" asked Nick.

"I was in my own berth, sir, but I was trussed up like a turkey ready for the oven; bound hand and foot, I was."

"And where was the yacht at that time?"

"As to that, I should say that we were just passing Astoria. I did manage to pull myself up a little in the berth so that I could see through the port-hole. It was very dark outside, but I am sure we were passing Astoria at the time."

"Well?"

"Then I heard two bells strike—one o'clock, you know."

"Yes."

"It was half-past ten when I turned in, and by figuring on the time—that is the length of time that it would have taken to rake down the fires and get up steam and to run out to where we were then, I figured that the yacht must have been captured about half-past eleven."

"If you were trussed up in your berth and were then shooting past Astoria, how does it happen that you are here now?" asked Nick.

"I am coming to that, sir."

"Very well."

"When I first came to my senses, I hadn't any idea what had happened. I only knew that the *Nadja* was in motion, and that she was making about half speed—a little more, maybe."

"Go on."

"I knew, of course, that something serious was the matter, for otherwise I wouldn't have been in the fix I found myself in."

"Certainly not."

"I was just trying to make heads and tails of it when the cabin door opened—I could see it from where I was lying—and in walked Mr. Stanhope Murray and Mr. Jean Cadillac, as large as life and as plain as day."

"I suppose you took a large and elegant tumble then, to put it classically; eh?"

"Well, sir, I caught on, of course."

"I should suppose that you might have done so."

"Cadillac came directly to the berth where I was lying, and he showed his white teeth under that black mustache of his in a manner that made me want to choke him."

"I haven't a doubt of it."

"'So,' he says to me, 'you have wakened up, have you?'

"I assured him that I had: and then I asked him how he got out of prison.

"'There never were bars made yet that could hold me,' he boasted. And, then, with another evil smile on his face, he asked me if I could swim.

"I told him that I could, and he replied that it was a lucky thing for me that I could swim, as otherwise I would be likely to sink.

"'We are going to chuck you overboard in about ten minutes,' he assured me. 'We have discussed the matter between us, and we have decided to give you just exactly half a chance for your life. A whole chance would be too good for you; but you shall have half a chance.'

"'I don't quite understand that,' I said to him; and then he explained.

"He and his friends had decided to untie my hands, but to leave my ankles bound together, and in this condition they were to throw me overboard just as we were passing the Brother Islands.

"There wasn't much time for talk after that, either, for we were almost there at the time, as you must know."

"Yes. What happened, then?"

"Well, sir, the things that happened then took place

mighty quick, if anybody should ask you. They yanked me out of that bunk——"

"You were not undressed, eh?"

"No; I had turned in with my clothes on, as it happened."

"Well?"

"They yanked me out of that bunk. Cadillac shoved a sealed envelope into one of my pockets, and he said, as he did it:

"'If you should happen to get ashore, you can deliver that to Nick Carter.'

"Then they picked me up between them and carted me to the after-deck, and from there to the rail.

"When we got to the rail, we were just passing the South Brother. Murray took out his penknife and snipped the cords that bound my hands together, and then, Mr. Carter, without another blessed word they lifted me up and hove me into the water as if—well, as if I were of no account whatever."

"And that is all you know about it, I suppose."

"No, sir, it isn't all that I know about it. I haven't got through yet."

"Go ahead, then."

"When I struck the water, it was fortunately slack tide. If it had been midway of the flood or ebb, I must have drowned; but as it was, I could make headway with just my hands."

"And so you managed to save yourself, eh?"

"I managed to make the island—South Brother, it was, too. There isn't a thing on it, as you know, but a single, weather-worn tree that has stood there just as it is now and hasn't grown a mite since I was a boy."

"Yes; I remember it."

"It was only a little past one o'clock this morning; it was darker than a pocket, too; but I somehow managed to make port—and if I wasn't about as thoroughly marooned as ever a sailorman was in this world, you can have my sea bag."

"Well? Get on with your story."

"I got them things off'n my feet about as quick as I could, and then I began to figure on how I was to get away. I remembered that the tide was slack, and figured that it wouldn't be much of a stunt for me to swim ashore—and I made up my mind to do it.

"North Brother was the nearest point where I could get a boat, but I happened to know that there is never a time when there aren't a few cases of smallpox there, and I knew if I landed on the North Brother, they wouldn't let me go ashore at all. Well, sir, maybe you won't believe it, but I swam with my clothes tied to my head, all the way to Steinway."

"That is a long swim," said the detective.

"It's three miles if it's an inch, sir."

"And from Steinway you came to me here as soon as you could make it, eh?"

"Yes, sir."

"Now, is that all the story?"

"Not quite, sir."

"What more is there?"

"When I was taken to the deck to be thrown overboard, I saw the others of the five—Russel, and Hadley, and Marston."

"Yes. Well?"

"And I saw Sam Denton, too, sir!"

"What! Your first officer? Your first mate?" asked Nick, in surprise.

"Yes, sir."

"What was he doing, Parker?"

"Well, sir, as near as I could make out he seemed to be enjoying things hugely. He actually laughed when they were making ready to throw me overboard; and just before they did it, he came up close and seized me by the arms and pulled my elbows back close together behind me, and says he, 'If I was doing this thing, I'd fasten his arms so.'"

"Then you think that Denton had joined with them, do you?" asked Nick.

"No, sirree! Because when he grabbed me by the arms, he managed to thrust a slip of folded paper into my hand at the same time," was the reply.

CHAPTER II.

THE PIRATE'S DEFIANCE.

"You did not lose that bit of paper, did you?" asked the detective anxiously.

"Not much. It wasn't very easy to swim with it, either, since my feet were tied together, and, of course, I had to keep the fingers of that hand closed in order not to lose the paper; but I hung onto it."

"Where is it?"

"It was soaked with water, Mr. Carter, and I couldn't preserve it; but I managed to save it until I got where there was light enough to read it, and I remember what it said."

"What did it say?"

"It said this: 'I have joined with these pirates, but I'm working for Nick Carter just the same. Tell him so. Sam.'"

"Which means," said Nick, "that Sam has taken the opportunity to make them believe he is in sympathy with them in order to remain aboard the *Nadja* and still to serve me in any way he can."

"Sure! That is just what it means."

"Did you see any of the other members of your own crew?"

"Not a sign of one of them, sir."

"And I suppose you have no idea what had become of them; eh?"

"Not an idea in the wide world, Mr. Carter."

"Did they seem to have a crew of their own aboard?"

"Well, I didn't see but a few men about. Only about half enough to call a full complement of men for the *Nadja;* but then, I didn't have much time to examine things."

"I suppose not."

"They were so cussed expeditious about getting me overboard that I didn't see much; besides, it was as dark as a pocket."

"What impression did you get about the crew of the *Nadja?* Do you think that they were perhaps prisoners in the forecastle?"

"I didn't get any impression at all, sir."

"Humph! I suppose you still have that letter that Cadillac gave to you to pass on to me, haven't you?"

"Yes, sir. Here it is."

Parker took the sealed envelope from one of his pockets.

It was still wet from its contact with the water, and Nick had no difficulty in pulling open the flap and extracting the letter.

The ink had "run" somewhat, and it was with some difficulty that the detective managed to read it, but he made it out at last, as follows:

"To whom it may concern, and especially to Nick Carter: You taught us a lesson, Carter, down there near the Saragossa Sea. You showed us the black flag, and you demonstrated what might be accomplished with it at the peak, provided one has sufficient nerve to back it up.

"We—and you know who we are—have managed to fool those dubs at Washington, and we are free again. We have taken a fancy to the *Nadja,* and so we borrow her for awhile. We know that nothing floats that can catch her on the open sea; we know that the black flag with its decorations of skull and cross-bones, is still in one of the lockers; we know that a long term of prison awaits us ashore, and we have decided that we might as well have the game as the name—hence the present condition of things.

"You may perform your favorite feat of gymnastics, if you like. I believe you call it the art of putting two and two together; and if you can read between these lines, you will be able to guess something of what we intend to do.

"As for the rest: You and all who are in sympathy with you can go to the devil; Hades would be a good place for you—and more than likely if you do that, we will meet again.

CADILLAC."

"Well," remarked the detective, "that seems to be very much to the point."

"Yes; so I should say," replied Parker.

The detective was silent a moment. Then he said:

"Practically all the information we have is that the *Nadja* has been stolen and that the men whom we arrested in the smuggling case have charge of her. That statement begins and ends our knowledge of the matter."

"So it seems, sir."

"Cadillac suggests very plainly here in this letter, that they intend to fly the black flag."

"Yes; and I think he means it, too."

"There is no doubt of that."

"He probably knows that they will have a short shift for it, before they are caught, and it is their game to have all the fun and excitement out of it they can before they are captured. I haven't a doubt that they will capture and pillage and burn, wherever an opportunity offers to do so, and for a time at least, with the *Nadja* under them, they can bid defiance to all the world."

"You are right, Parker. You are right."

"And it won't be at all an easy matter to capture them, either."

"No; it will not."

"The *Nadja* carries coal to take her ten thousand miles, you know."

"Yes; of course I know."

"And her bunkers are full to the brim right now."

"Yes," replied Nick musingly. "I supposed you had had her coaled during the week."

"She is provisioned, too, up to the notch."

"It strikes me, Parker, that we have rather made ready for their accommodation; eh?"

"That is the annoying part of it, sir. I am that mad that I could—could—*cuss,* sir!"

"I haven't a doubt of it. So could I—if it would do us any good."

"What is to be done, sir? Will you tell me that?"

"I will when I have decided what to do."

"You are as much at sea as I am about it, aren't you, sir?"

"Just for the moment I think I am. I would like to know something about what became of our own crew, however."

"I might go over to the Basin and look about me a bit for information," suggested the captain.

"No; we will wait awhile. I will probably go over there myself after a little. There is the door-bell now. Possibly it may be one of your men, Parker."

"It might be at that," was the reply.

Joseph, who had returned from his errand in the meantime, now appeared at the door.

"Three men below to see you, sir," he said. "They told me to say, 'Bo's'n Bill Spikes and two sailors from the *Nadja,* sir.'"

"Show them up here," said Nick shortly.

A moment later the three men entered the room, Bill Spikes in advance, and all with downcast eyes and shamed faces.

But the boatswain brightened up somewhat when he recognized his captain in consultation with the owner.

"It's worth a month's pay to find you here, sir," he said. Then he turned to the detective and added:

"Beggin' your pardon, sir, we have come to find out

what has become of the *Nadja*, and to know if we're discharged, sir?"

"What would you be discharged for?" replied Nick. "What has happened?"

The boatswain hitched his trousers a little, and moved his weight from one foot to the other. Then he replied slowly:

"We don't none of us rightly know what has happened, sir. We think maybe as how the devil himself came aboard of us last night, sir."

"That is more than likely true," replied Nick, smiling. "Tell me what makes you think that."

"Well, sir, it's this away. We turns in at four bells, we does, all serene——"

"You are referring to the entire crew, I suppose?" interrupted the detective.

"Barrin' three of us, yes, sir."

"Well?"

"We turns in at four bells and we goes to sleep. Then this mornin' at seven bells of the mornin' watch, we wakes up."

"Well?"

"When we wakes up, we are in a joint ashore, instead of being in our bunks aboard the *Nadja*, and there ain't a blessed one of us can tell how we gets there."

"What kind of a joint did you wake up in, Bill?"

"Well, sir, it is a sort of dago gin-mill. When we axed him how we got there, he told us that early this morning, or some time in the night, leastwise, we war brought there, and he was paid for lettin' us sleep off our loads in his place. So he ups and turns us in along the scuppers in his place, and we wakes up there this mornin' with heads on us that would make a sea cask look like a thimble—it would."

The detective smiled indulgently.

"And that ain't the worst of it, sir, beggin' your pardon, sir," continued Bill.

"What do you call the worst of it, Bill?"

"Well, sir, I've had mean trick played on me afore now, but this is the first time that I ever got a jag on without knowin' something about it. Here's me. I goes to bed all quietlike in my bunk. I ain't had a taste o' grog in no shape, for months. Then some lubber heaves in sight, and blowed if he don't take me ashore and fill me up, chock full, in my sleep; and I never know nothin' about it at all. He not only gets me a gilt-edged jag, but a-beggin' your pardon, sir—I'm hanged if he even lets me have so much as a taste of the licker, so's I can remember it."

"I suppose there is no doubt about the jag, is there, Bill?"

"Well, sir, if you had my head on you, you wouldn't think there was."

"And how about the others of the crew?"

"They're all the same, sir. And they're all just as mad as I be about it."

"They all had the left-over jag, did they?"

"Aye, aye, sir."

"And not one of them remembers getting it, eh?"

"Not one of 'em, sir. Then there's another thing."

"What is that, Bill?"

"Where's the *Nadja?*"

"Why? Couldn't you find her?"

"Narry a find, sir. When we woke up in that joint and had soaked our heads a bit, and sort of trimmed our sails into shipshape, we veered off and sailed full and by for the *Nadja*, believin' that we'd ketch the devil from the old man as soon as we showed up. We gets there, and there ain't no *Nadja* there. We rubs our headlights a bit, thinkin' mebby we've got 'em; but bless you, sir, there ain't no sign of that yacht, nowhere."

"So you decided to come here, did you?"

"Aye, aye, sir. We held a meetin'. We three were appointed a committee. Now, sir, mebby you can tell us where we got that jag, and how we got ashore into that dago joint, and what has become of the *Nadja*."

"I think I can, Bill. First, where are the other men?"

"They're waitin' over there at the moorings, sir."

"Well, you go along back and tell them that it wasn't a real jag that you had; it was only an imitation; and——"

"Beggin' your pardon, sir, that wa'n't no imitation. I know the real thing when I'm up against it, and for a large-sized, double-edged, gold-mounted, jewel-studded jag, you couldn't beat this one—that is, not for a headache—this side of Bombay. No, sirree! That wasn't any bloomin' imitation. That was the real dyed-in-the-wool article, where the colors don't run, either."

CHAPTER III.

A MYSTERIOUS ISLAND OF THE SEA.

The detective laughed heartily at Bill's description of his supposed jag, and decided that it would be just as well not to enlighten him concerning the origin of it; for there was no doubt in Nick's mind that the men had been skilfully chloroformed, and then taken ashore and left at the Italian saloon where they awakened at half-past seven in the morning.

"Are you all alike, Bill?" he asked. "Don't any of you remember anything that happened?"

"No, sir. Not one of us."

"Who was the watch on the deck last night?"

"Mortimer, sir. He confesses that he dropped asleep on a coil of rope. He doesn't remember a thing after that."

"Well, Bill, do you remember that little trip we had not long ago when we went down to the Saragossa Sea and captured the smugglers?"

"Aye, aye, sir; that I does!"

"Do you remember the five men who came aboard of us, who were the leaders of that outfit?"

"Aye, aye, sir."

"They are the ones who administered your jag to you, Bill."

"By the Lord Harry, sir, I would like to run afoul of one of 'em again, if that is the case."

"It is the case. They gave you the jag in your sleep. They carried you ashore and left you at the Italian's. Then they took possession of the yacht and now they are somewhere at sea, bound for nobody knows where."

"I thought as how they were in prison, sir."

"So they were; but they got out of prison, somehow. This is the result of their escape."

"But we are going after them, aren't we, sir?"

"I suppose so—as soon as we can get some idea where to go."

"Don't you think, sir, that they would set sail for that same place where we overhauled 'em before?" asked Bill Spikes.

"To tell you the truth, Bill, I haven't the least idea what place, or what portion of the globe, they would head for; only that I do think they will put as much distance between them and New York as they possibly can."

"I wouldn't wonder, sir, if they intended to fly the black flag, out and out, sir."

"That *is* what they are going to do."

"And make regular dyed-in-the-wool pirates of themselves?"

"Yes. Just that."

"Maybe, sir, it was us who gave them the idea."

"I suspect that it was. In fact, they confess that much in a letter they left for me."

"And it ain't likely, is it, sir—— I beg pardon, sir, I don't want to be presumptuous."

"Go ahead with what you wish to say. We are holding a consultation, now."

"Well, sir, it ain't likely to my way of thinkin' that they've got much of a crew along with 'em now."

"No; I don't really suppose they have."

"And if they are going into the black flag and the skull and cross-bones business, they will want quite a crew, won't they?"

"More than likely; yes."

"Then it seems to me, sir, that the place they will head for, will be the place in the world where they would be most likely to pick up such a crew with the least trouble."

"And where, Bill, do you suppose that would be?" asked the detective.

"I am thinking about that, sir. You see, they couldn't get no sailors around here, or in any of the regular ports, who would go in for that sort of thing, for they would all know that it couldn't last, and that the end of it would be a rope and a noose."

"That is true enough."

"And even if there were a lot of men hanging around somewhere, who wouldn't hesitate to take up with that sort of business, the men on the yacht wouldn't dare to broach the subject to them for fear of being betrayed."

"Well, what are you getting at, Bill?"

"I think they would make for some place where they wouldn't be afraid to ship their men and where they could pick up about the sort of cutthroats they want."

"And where should you say that would be?"

"Well, sir, it might be any one of several places. It might be Morocco, or Algiers. They make real pirates down there, jest as we make bankers and financiers up here to carry on the same trade. Then again it might be the China Sea. Pirates have been breedin' around there since the year one—and before that. Then, again, it might be some South American port. It might be La Guayra, in Venezuela, or Bahia, in Brazil; or it might be around on the other coast."

"I don't see that you are helping us much, Bill, with your suggestions."

"I ain't through yet, sir."

"Go on, then."

"Morocco and Algiers are in the Mediterranean, and if they went in there, they would be sort of bottled up. There would be Gibraltar at one end of the run, and the Suez Canal at the other, and they might be stopped when they were getting away."

"Yes."

"So I think we would consider that they hadn't gone there. They would keep to the open sea."

"Well!"

"Maybe you'll remember, sir, that when we had those five men aboard the *Nadja* as prisoners, and you didn't want 'em to know that it was you who had captured them, I was the one who waited on them and carried their food to them, and all that sort of thing."

"Yes; perfectly."

"What I'm gettin' at is this: Almost every time I went into their presence, they were a-talkin' to each other in Spanish. I didn't let on that I know'd the lingo, and so I heard a lot."

"You are getting interesting, now, Bill. Go ahead."

"Well, sir, I didn't hear so very much, after all is said, and I didn't think that it amounted to anything at the time; but now it comes back to me, and it may be that it does."

"Tell me about it."

"It wasn't much, but such as it was, it was this: One day I heard that French feller—I forgit his name——"

"Cadillac."

"Aye, aye, sir. I heard him mention the name of a small island that nobody has ever paid any attention to

down among the Caribees. I don't suppose you've ever heard of it. It's charted, of course, but I'll bet there ain't one sailor in ten thousand who ever heard of it, and I'll bet there ain't a schoolboy in the land who knows where it is."

"Well?"

"It is called Isle de Fuego. Fuego Island. In other words Fire Island."

"I understand."

"I don't suppose it is more than three miles all the way around it, and the island itself is nothing but the cone of a mountain that rises out of the sea to the height of about two thousand feet; but I was wrecked there once, and I stayed there six weeks, so when that garlic-eater mentioned it, I pricked up my ears."

"What was it that he said about it?"

"He was just a-tellin' his four friends that if he ever escaped he should make for that particular island, and he was advisin' them to do the same when I blowed in and he stopped."

"So it is your opinion that they would make that their headquarters? Is that what you mean, Bill?"

"Yes, sir, it is. I think they would go to Bahia, and Rio de Janiero, and to a few other places along the South American coast, and pick up a crew, and that then they would head for Fire Island where they would organize, and lay their plans."

"But why Fire Island? You haven't told me much about that place yet."

"Fire Island ain't very big, as I have already told you. To most people it is regarded merely as a mountain that rises out of the sea, with no possible landing-place anywhere on its shores; but to me, who spent six weeks there alone, it is different."

"And it was presumably different, also, to Cadillac; eh?"

"Aye, aye, sir. I heard him say enough about it to assure me that much."

"Now, tell me how it is different. Tell me what you mean by that expression."

"As I said, sir, the island is nothing more or less than the cone of a mountain that rises out of the sea, and that mountain has once been an active volcano."

"Yes."

"Well, the last time it blew up—probably two or three hundred years ago, it not only blew off the top of it, but it blew out one of the sides as well, and it left a hole there through which the big *Celtic* could sail without any trouble. Then the sea rushed inside and filled up the hole, and the consequence is that inside of that hollow mountain there is as pretty a harbor as you would find anywhere else in the world.

"There is a bit of land in there, too; about what a farmer would call half a dozen acres, I opine; and the light comes in through the old crater at the top, so it makes a very habitable spot.

"You wouldn't believe it, maybe, but there are trees and things a-growin' inside of that mountain, and there are goats and other things a-running around there, too. In the middle of the day the sun shines as bright as it does anywhere, but, of course, it don't last long."

"I should suppose not."

"Anyhow, sir, it is an ideal place for just such an outfit as that one, and I am of the opinion that wherever those men have gone with the *Nadja* in order to pick up a crew, that sooner or later they will show up there."

"I haven't a doubt of it, Bill. You have been of great service to me in this matter."

"You see, sir, that that Frenchman couldn't possibly have any idea that I knowed anything about Fire Island. Savin' him and me, and the few I have told about it from time to time, I don't really suppose there is another man who knows a blessed thing about it."

"Probably not."

"And so there you are, sir. If I had command of this expedition, I would set sail for Fire Island at once in the hope that maybe I would get there even now, before they did. For if they have got to go somewhere to pick up a crew, it will take them quite a time to do it."

"That is quite certain."

"You can't pick up a crew of that sort in a holy minute, sir."

"No."

"You've got to be mighty particular about who you talk to; and you have got to take time to sound a man before you make a break at him."

"For example," said the detective, smiling, "it wouldn't do for anybody to approach you on a subject of that kind, would it?"

"Not on your life, Mr. Carter."

"Well, Bill, I am greatly obliged to you; and now I have got something for you to do."

"Aye, aye, sir. Pass the word."

"I want you to get back where the other men are, and I want you to keep them together for me so that when I want them I can find them."

"Aye, aye, sir."

"You can hang out at the Sailor's Rest, over there at the Basin, until I want you."

"Aye, aye, sir."

"And when I am ready for you, I will send Captain Parker after you. I will hold you responsible for the men, Bill."

"I won't fail you, sir."

"Thank you. You can go now. I will probably send for you some time to-morrow."

"And I suppose, sir, that then you will have found a way to go after those pirates?"

"Yes I think so."

"Thankee, sir. I just wan't to see 'em once, on account of that there jag."

CHAPTER IV.

THE PIRATE'S FIRST VICTIM.

The detective's first act after the departure of the boatswain and his two companions, was to make use of the long-distance telephone and call up Washington.

He had himself placed in communication with the secret service department and the treasury department, and, after a little, he had Roger Conners at the phone.

To him, who had assisted in the smuggling case, he imparted all the information already recounted here. At the end of it he said:

"I don't suppose there would be any use in attempting to obtain a torpedo-boat, or even the *Dolphin*, from the government, would there, Conners?"

"No; not until Murray and his outfit does something that would be an act of piracy," was the reply.

"Well, I will find a craft somewhere, and I shall be quick about it. The point is, do you want to go with me?"

"Sure thing, Nick."

"Then it is up to you to leave Washington to-night."

"I will take the five-o'clock train this afternoon and be with you about eleven."

That closed that conversation, and Nick hung up the receiver.

Then, telling Parker to wait for him and to make himself at home, he ordered around his automobile and hurried down-town, where he sought his old-time friend Simmons.

He was found at his office in the Empire Building, and to him Nick said:

"Simmons, I have been reading a good deal in the papers of late about that new yacht of yours. Is she finished yet?"

"Yes; she has been in commission three weeks," was the reply.

"Where is she now?"

"Just now she is on her way here from Newport. She should arrive off West Twenty-third Street about five this afternoon, I think."

"Is she very fast, Simmons?"

"Why? Do you want to bet that I cannot beat the *Nadja?*"

"Would *you* bet that you *can* beat her?" was Nick's reply.

"Well," slowly, "I wouldn't bet a big pile on it. To tell you the truth, I think they would run a pretty close tie. I will make a small bet with you, though, just to see them in a race together."

"Have you any particular engagement, for the yacht, or for yourself, for the next week?" the detective asked him then.

"No. Why?"

Nick told him why, then. He related the whole story just as we know it; and at the close he said:

"If you want a little spice of adventure, take your yacht—what is her name, by the way?"

"I call her the *Creeper.*"

"That isn't a bad name at all. Will you take the *Creeper* and come with me in her to see if we can catch those fellows, and recover my yacht?"

"Will I? I should say I would," was the instant reply. "When will you start, Nick?"

"Just the first minute that it is possible. Has the *Creeper* been coaled lately?"

"Her bunkers are full up."

"And provisioned?"

"Thoroughly."

"How much of a crew have you aboard of her?"

"Twenty, all told."

"Do you think we could crowd my own sixteen men—— No, there are only thirteen, for three are missing—do you think we could crowd them in with your men?"

"Sure. Easy."

"One of my men—the first mate, Denton—shipped with the pirates, and I suspect that the two others who are missing did the same. Denton, I know, is loyal, so we are sure of one more man on our side when we run up against them."

"Aren't you sure of the others as well?"

"Reasonably so. I think that Denton has persuaded them to go with him."

"I think you will find it that way."

"So, with your crew together with mine, we will have thirty-three men, not counting you, or Conners, or Parker, or myself. That should be enough."

"Yes, in all conscience."

"Now, Simmons, you are always a man for an emergency. Do you happen to know where you can pick up a pair of rapid-fire guns—one for the bow and one for the stern—between now and dark to-night?"

"I do that. I know exactly where to get them."

"And the ammunition as well?"

"Sure. The guns wouldn't be much good without something to feed them, would they?"

"Hardly."

"You needn't give the matter another thought, Nick. I'll be ready for you and your crew and also your friends, by midnight to-night, and there is nothing to prevent our sailing at once, as soon as I am ready, is there?"

"Not a thing in the world."

"I wouldn't like, though, to shoot the *Nadja* full of holes. I remember her too well."

"I would rather lose the *Nadja* than to lose an oppor-

tunity of capturing the fellows who stole her," replied Nick grimly.

"Suppose your boatswain should happen to be all wrong and that we do not find them at that place you call Fire Island. What then?"

"We will wait there a reasonable time for them to show up, and if they do not put in an appearance, we will have to go on a hunt for them. It is certain that they are somewhere in the world, and that they can sooner or later be found. It is up to us to find them."

"And we'll do it, too! Shake on that, Nick."

And thus it happened that just as the clocks throughout the city were striking twelve that night, Nick Carter, followed by his thirteen men, and also by Conners and Parker, went aboard the *Creeper* at West Twenty-third Street.

And they were no sooner aboard than Simmons gave the order to start, and the swift yacht, almost the counterpart of the *Nadja* in size and shape, steamed down the bay toward the Narrows, and thence out to sea, heading almost directly south.

Shortly after they were free from the wharf Simmons asked Nick to accompany him over the yacht on a tour of inspection.

The detective found that his friend had thought of everything.

Hammocks had been slung in the forecastle, for the extra men, and there were three rapid-fire guns on the deck instead of two, for there was one amidships as well as one at either end of the craft.

Also there was a good supply of ammunition, and below, in the cabin, there were stored away fifty Mauser rifles with ammunition to go with them.

"I thought it more than likely that we would have to put up a fight before we were well out of this affair," said Simmons, "and I thought, also, that it would be well to be thoroughly prepared for it."

"We certainly ought to make a good fight with what you have here," was the detective's comment.

"You see, Nick," Simmons continued, "those fellows will be desperate if they should happen to find that we have them cornered. They will have nothing to lose and everything to gain, if they can lick us."

"That's so," admitted Nick.

"Do you think they have got the sand to fight?"

"Yes, I do think so. I don't look for much fight in that fellow Russel, but the others I am sure are not deficient in courage."

"And it is a thousand to one that they are as well armed as we are; eh?"

"It is a thousand to one that they will be better armed than we are if they have had the time and the opportunity to procure arms."

"You have interested me considerably in your description of that island, Nick."

"The description is Bill Spikes'; not mine."

"All the same, it would appear that it is an ideal spot for a pirate crew; eh?"

"Yes."

"And has it occurred to you that if they are up to snuff, and if they suspect that there is the slightest possibility that they will be followed to that island, that they might go to the length of planting a torpedo at the entrance to their retreat?"

"No; I hadn't thought of that."

"It will be well to look out for it when we get there, all the same."

"It will be well to look out for all sorts of tricks," replied the detective. "They are capable of anything that is thoroughly devilish, and they wouldn't hesitate to blow us into eternity, if they should get half a chance."

"Then it is up to us not to give them the chance, isn't it?"

The morning of the third day out found our friends about fifty miles east of the island of Puerto Rico, and toward noon, off the port bow, they sighted a three-masted schooner that was flying signals of distress.

Immediately they bore down upon her, never once dreaming that here they were destined to find the first victim of the pirate.

The sea was not sufficiently smooth for them to approach near enough to the schooner to converse from the decks, and so a boat was lowered and the detective, accompanied by Conners, were rowed to the schooner's side.

When they had climbed aboard the partly dismantled vessel they discovered that only the captain and three men were left aboard of her, and in reply to the first question that was asked him, as to what was the matter, he said:

"Possibly you will hardly credit me, sir, but the truth is I have been afoul of a pirate."

"A pirate!" exclaimed Nick, pretending incredulity.

"Yes, sir, a pirate. The real article, too."

"What did he do to you?"

"Look around you and you can answer that question for yourself. I had a cargo of coffee and spices, bound from Mexico to New York, and he helped himself to as much as he wanted of that stuff. I also had a hundred thousand dollars in silver money, stowed away in my cabin, that I was taking North for a Mexican gentleman who wanted to send it there for investment. They discovered that, and they took it, too."

"What then?"

"Why, then they stripped me of every sail I had; they housed my topmasts and took them away. I had three hundred cases of wine; they took that. I had fifteen men in my crew, and they prevailed upon twelve of them to join with them. Then they scuttled the schooner, and we'd have been to the bottom before this if we hadn't worked our hands off and succeeded in plugging the holes

they made. I wouldn't have believed it, sir, if I hadn't seen it with my own eyes."

"A real pirate, eh?"

"Yes, sir. Black flag and all. That's as sure as you're born."

"Did you see their captain? Did you have a good look at him?"

"I did that. He came aboard."

"Tell me what he looked like," said Nick.

"He was a handsome devil, with black eyes and a black mustache, and the whitest teeth I ever saw."

"Cadillac," said the detective to Conners.

"What! You know him?" cried the captain of the schooner.

"Yes. We know him. We are in pursuit of him. Now, sir, tell me what we can do for you."

"Well, sir, if you happen to have any canvas aboard your yacht, you can supply me with some so that I can make San Juan. I can communicate with my owners from there, and I can repair and continue my voyage," was the straightforward reply.

CHAPTER V.

THE PIRATE'S ISLAND RETREAT.

Bill Spikes was now much in evidence, aft, for upon him devolved the duty of pilot.

The *Creeper* was five days out from New York and was cruising among the lesser Caribbean islands in search of that particular one where Spikes had once been cast away.

"You see, sir," he said to Nick, "we will just have to look for it till we find it, because I had no means of taking an observation, and no data upon which to figure dead reckoning, so I ain't got more'n a general idee as to where that there island is; but I'll find it."

And so they adopted a zigzag course among the small islands, in their search for it.

But, although Bill had said that the mountain which formed the island reared its top almost two thousand feet above the water, it proved to be a very illusive quantity, and it was the morning of the seventh day out before they sighted it.

But, suddenly, Bill Spikes, who was on watch at the time, sang out:

"Land, ho-o-o-o!"

Then he wheeled in his tracks and ran excitedly aft, forgetting for the moment that meed of wholesome respect which he always exhibited in the presence of his superiors.

"There she is, sir! There she is!" he cried out to Nick, who was seated under the awning away aft.

The detective started to his feet and gazed in the direction indicated, and, sure enough, there was the mountain sticking up out of the water, and looking exactly as Bill had described it.

It resembled in shape an Edam cheese from which the top has been squarely sliced off with a knife, and as they happened to be approaching it from the south side, Nick could see, with the aid of his glass, what appeared to be a huge hole in the side of the mountain, down at the water's edge.

"I guess you are right, Bill," he said. "That must be your Fire Island."

"There ain't a mite of doubt about it, sir," was the firm reply. "I recognized it at once."

"The question is," continued the detective, "are our pirates inside that hollow mountain at the present moment?"

"Of course, sir, I can't rightly answer that, not knowing, sir."

"Of course not."

"But, all the same, sir, if you will run up close and give me a small boat, it won't take me long to find out. I know the way through the ring of reefs that surround it."

"Is the island surrounded by reefs, Bill?"

"Aye, aye, sir; worse than them that's around Bermuda."

"Could you run the *Creeper* through them, Bill?"

"Aye, aye, sir; easy enough, if you want me to. But I think it would be well, sir, to find out first if the pirates are there."

"So do I."

"Shall I take a boat, sir, when we get close enough——"

"Wait, Bill. Don't get too previous. I'll give you your orders when there are any to be given."

"Aye, aye, sir;" humbly.

"Tell me about those reefs. Do they entirely surround the island?"

"They do that, sir."

"And where is the channel through them?"

"There's one on the north side, sir; and there is one here on the south side, too."

"Both large enough to take this vessel through?"

"Yes, sir."

"Pass the word to lay her three points off and skirt the island to the eastward, Bill."

"Aye, aye, sir."

"If they are inside there," mused the detective while this order was being passed, "they will see us, of course, but they will think that we are just passing. They would not be looking for pursuit quite as soon as this."

And so the *Creeper* skirted the island to the eastward, and her course was not altered again until Nick knew that they were well out of view from the hole in the mountain's side. But then she was brought short around

and steered back again toward the mountain island on the north side of it.

"How close can we run in there without danger of hitting a reef?" asked the detective of Bill Spikes.

"You can go within half a mile, sir. After that there is a double reef, with deep water between them, and deep water beyond them."

"And the channel through those reefs—where is that?"

"Dead ahead, as we are going now, sir."

"Suppose that there are men now inside that harbor in the mountain."

"Yes, sir."

"Is there any way in which they could get to the top of the crater inside, in order to keep a lookout there?"

"I don't think so, sir. Still, it might be done with proper tackle."

"If they happen to have a lookout there, they can see us now."

"Aye, aye, sir."

"I am going aft, Bill. You are to remain here, as pilot. When you think we are as close to the reefs as we ought to go, stop her."

"Aye, aye, sir. You are not going to venture inside just now, then?"

"You are to obey orders without asking questions about them, and I don't wish to have to tell you that again."

As soon as Nick reached the after-deck, he called to Conners and Simmons, and to them he related all that had passed between him and Spikes.

"The question now is," he finished, "shall we go inside the reefs with the yacht, or shall we lower away a small boat and reconnoiter, first?"

"What is your own idea about it, Nick?" asked Conners.

"I think it would be wise to make use of the small boat before we get into a place where we might find it difficult to get away," replied the detective.

"Well," said Simmons, "you are in command of this expedition. What you say, goes."

"I suppose you mean to go yourself, Nick?" asked Conners.

"Certainly."

"Will you take me with you?"

"I think, Conners, that your place is here—yours and Simmons'. We cannot afford to put all our eggs into one basket, you know."

"No-o; certainly not. All the same——"

"All the same, Roger, if you don't mind, I will leave you both here. There is no knowing what I may run into, there."

"For that very reason——"

"For that very reason you will remain here like a good little boy; eh?"

"All right, Nick. I know how to obey orders. Who will you take with you?"

"I will take that clinker-built boat of Simmons' and four of my own men to do the rowing. She carries four pairs of oars, but I will take four single ones, with a man at each oar. I will put Spikes in the stern to act as coxswain, and I will sit in the bow, in order to see all that is going on ahead of me."

"What's the matter with taking the gasoline launch, Nick?" asked Simmons.

"Too much noise. Her exhaust and her sparking could be heard three or four miles over these still waters."

"That's so, all right."

"We can move very silently with the oars, you know."

"Yes. How long do you think you will be gone?"

"Two or three hours at the most; possibly not so long a time as that."

"And what are we to do while you are away?"

"Lie on and off right about here until you see me returning; then pick me up."

Just at that moment the engines of the *Creeper* ceased to revolve, and, after another moment, they began to back until the graceful yacht floated like a huge swan upon the calm sea.

"Forward, there!" called out the detective softly.

"Aye, aye, sir!" came the cautious reply.

"Lower away that cutter on the starboard side."

"Aye, aye, sir!"

"Jones, Crabbe, Peters, and Hemiup will man the oars. Spikes for coxswain."

It was quickly done, and soon all was in readiness; and then, after Nick had gone over the side and taken his seat in the bow of the cutter, he called back to Simmons:

"You might pass down a pair of those Mausers. We might have use for them."

Two minutes later the cutter was bounding away over the waves, propelled swiftly by the powerful oarsmen whom Nick had selected from among the members of his own crew.

From the deck of the *Creeper* they watched him and the boat that carried him.

They could see Spikes as he guided the cutter deftly among the reefs, and they watched the boat as it spun half around and then passed the second line of rocks in safety.

"It don't look to me as if it would be an easy matter to take a vessel of the size of the *Creeper* through that place," remarked Simmons. "I wonder if that fellow Spikes knows what he is about?"

"There isn't a better sailor, or a more reliable man afloat than that same Bill Spikes," replied Captain Parker, who was standing near. "If he says he can take the *Creeper* through there, you may rest assured that he can do it. If he was an educated man, he would have been a captain long before this."

The cutter had now passed entirely inside the reefs;

had turned to the eastward and was making her way swiftly along the base of the mountain which dipped down sheer into the sea at a pitch that was almost perpendicular.

It was remarkable how small and insignificant the cutter looked against that huge mass of rock. She seemed like a fly that was crawling along the edge of the water.

And those who remained behind watched her as she began to make the turn, knowing that in a few moments more she would be lost to view, and that after that they would have only conjecture to go upon, until they could see her returning.

And then she rounded a spur of the mountain that stuck out into the water a hundred yards or so, and disappeared.

"I'm blowed if I approve of this sort of thing," growled Simmons. "We've got to sit here and sweat now, for the next two or three hours, while we await his return; and, in the meantime, we won't know whether Nick has been captured and killed, or what might have happened to him."

"I suppose," said Conners philosophically, "that comes in as part of the expedition; but I think that Nick will return to us, all right. He usually does bob up serenely, you know."

"Yes; I know. All the same it is trying while it lasts."

"What do you suppose they will find inside of that mountain, Parker?" asked Conners, by way of changing the subject.

"Well, sir," replied the captain slowly, "they are looking for pirates, and it wouldn't surprise me in the least if they found pirates there. After what Bill Spikes had to say about the place, I think as he does, that it is just the place the man Cadillac would select."

"And we know that Cadillac is in command, don't we? At least, he acted the part of chief when they boarded that schooner. Gee! But that was an exhibition of gall for you! What do you suppose they expected to find aboard a three-masted schooner? Eh?"

"They found just what they went after," replied Parker dryly.

"They couldn't have known of that hundred thousand dollars in silver."

"No; but they were after men—and they found them. A pirate crew doesn't amount to much unless there are a lot of them. What they wanted was men, and they got twelve of them, according to the captain of the schooner."

"And I wouldn't wonder if they had more by this time," said Simmons.

"They won't have any difficulty in getting all the men they want after they have made one or two successes, sir. I only hope, just now, that they won't get Mr. Carter."

CHAPTER VI.

A STRANGE AND WONDERFUL PLACE.

It was just an hour from the time they left the yacht's side in the cutter until they rested on their oars within a few rods of the opening through the side of the mountain, and in that time they had circumnavigated rather more than a quarter of the island.

Not a sign of life in any form save that of the numerous sharks that infested the waters had been seen; but now, as they approached the opening through the side of the mountain, Nick thought it wise to use extreme caution.

He was surprised, when they approached that hole, to see how large it was.

Bill Spikes had spoken truly when he said that the big *Celtic* could easily float through it, into the interior of the mountain.

"I am rather inclined to wish that I had waited until darkness to make this inspection," he was thinking to himself. "However, now that I am here, I will go ahead with it."

He loked over the sides of the boat into the water at a huge shark as it swam gracefully past them, and could not repress a shudder of repulsion, for there is something about a shark—about the mere mention of the word, in fact—which engenders apprehension.

"I wonder if those fellows are man-eaters?" he said to Spikes.

"I wouldn't trust 'em, sir," was the reply. "Why? Were you thinking of going overboard?"

"Yes. I was thinking of swimming through that hole in the wall. I would stand much less chance of being discovered than in this boat."

"All the same, sir, I don't think I would risk it."

"Give way, then!" ordered the detective. "Slowly, men. Keep her just on the move, that is all."

"Aye, aye, sir."

In utter silence they drew nearer to the opening; and here the sea was so smooth that it was possible to keep quite close to the side of the mountain.

When they had almost reached the hole, Nick gave the sign for the men to cease rowing altogether, and after that the boat was permitted to drift ahead as she would, until at last they floated past the edge of the cavity.

"Starboard oars! Sharp!" ordered the detective, then. "Back with your port oars! Now, altogether. Give way. So-o-o! Let her drift again!"

They were inside the mountain.

For a moment the dense gloom in there bereft them of the sense of sight; but after a little they could see quite plainly, and by waiting still longer until their eyes had recovered from the effects of the fierce glare of the sun outside, everything inside that strange and wonderful place was visible.

It was like a half twilight; it was such a light as may

be noticed when black and heavy clouds pass suddenly between the sun and the earth on an otherwise bright day.

It was really a wonderful place.

The entire mountain was as hollow as an eggshell—and truth to tell about the shape of one—the pointed ends were cut off about an eighth of the way down.

And the waters of the ocean flowed in and out of it with the tides.

In extent, that strange place was almost a quarter of a mile in diameter, and it was all water, save at the northern side, where, as Bill Spikes had said, there were, perhaps, half a dozen acres of solid land, upon which verdure was growing.

Almost immediately the men in the boat were aware of sounds proceeding from the shore—we can call it by no other term—and, as they listened, they discovered that they were made by hammers.

And then, as the detective produced his night-glass and directed it toward the sounds, he could see that there were many men there, and that they were engaged in erecting a number of small buildings.

Also, there was a fire burning in front of a lean-to that had already been erected, and which, therefore, Nick at once decided was the cook-house.

But nowhere around or about the place was there a sign of the *Nadja*.

It was quite evident that she had been there, however, for there were the men at work, getting ready for her return.

"There isn't a sign of a craft of any——" Nick began; but Spikes interrupted him.

"Beg pardon, sir," he said. "If you will look a little to the north'ard, you will see a small lumber schooner there. I suppose they have captured her and towed her in here, because they wanted the lumber she was loaded with."

"It looks as if they had laid there plans very carefully, and as if they were carrying them out with expedition, too," muttered the detective.

"Aye, aye, sir; that it does."

"Bill, do you suppose those fellows will discover us here?"

"I hardly think so, sir. We're a good ways off, and they're busy. Besides, they ain't looking for nobody of our figurehead just about now."

"Sailors have sharp eyes."

"Aye, aye, sir. If one of 'em should happen to look this way, he might see us. I don't think it would be wise to give 'em too much of a chance, sir."

"How many men can you make out over there, Bill?"

"Well, sir, I've been a-countin' of 'em, and I figger that there's some'r's near a dozen, sir."

"I have counted fifteen."

He was silent for a moment after that, still studying the aspect of things, and then he said to the men quietly:

"Work her around now, slowly."

"Aye, aye, sir."

"When I give the order, dip deep and silently, and shoot the cutter ahead as rapidly as it can be done. Then when I say, *now*, put all your power on the port sweeps and get her out of sight around the edge of that hole as quickly as you can."

"Aye, aye, sir."

"All ready! Give—*way!*"

The cutter shot ahead as if she were gifted with life.

She moved like a bird as far as the opening through the rocks, and then the detective called out:

"*Now!*"

Instantly she was turned, and in another second she was safely out of sight from any of the men who were busily at work on that subterranean shore.

"Well," said Nick, "we know more about affairs now than we did before we came here. We are satisfied that your ideas were correct, Bill."

"Aye, aye, sir. That we are."

"Now, men, let her go. Get us back to the *Creeper* as soon as you can."

The four oarsmen bent energetically to their work, with the result that in a surprisingly short space of time they once more rounded that spur of the island of which mention has already been made and came in sight of the yacht.

She seemed not to have moved since they left her, and Nick saw that their approach was discovered almost as soon as they came into view.

It wasn't long after that before he stood again on the deck beside his friends, who were plying him with eager questions.

"Now, if you three fellows will just hold your whist, as Conners would say if he spoke his native brogue, as I have heard him do when he is excited, I will tell you all about it."

And he did; from beginning to end.

"What do you think of it all, Nick?" asked Conners, when he was done.

"I think that the *Nadja* has been here and gone away again, of course. They have captured a lumber schooner and towed her in there in order to provide themselves with the lumber they wanted for their buildings."

"But where is she now, do you suppose?"

"Who can say? More than likely she has gone somewhere to provide herself with guns and ammunition."

"And more men; eh?"

"That, without a doubt."

"But it can't be long since she was here, can it? We have followed her almost directly to this place."

"Don't forget that we started two days later than she did. Don't forget that Cadillac probably knew the

exact location of the island, whereas we have spent several days looking for it."

"I did forget about all that."

"It may therefore be three or four days since she was here, and went away again."

"If we only knew where she went to, we could figure something about the probable time of her return."

"I think," said the detective slowly, "that it will be at least another week before we may look for her back here."

"So long as that?"

"Yes."

"Why so?"

"Because in the nature of things she would make for one of the South American ports. It would only be in such a place that they could hope to fit the yacht out without having to reply to a lot of very leading questions."

"That is true enough."

"That hundred thousand dollars in silver that they took from the three-masted schooner will go a long way toward helping them out in that particular; and, besides that, I haven't a doubt that they had a lot of money."

"Do you think so? Really? Where would they get it?"

"You can rest assured that out of that smuggling business of theirs they had a large and elegant nest-egg laid by somewhere. Besides, Hadley was a man who always knew where to put his hands upon a good supply of cash. It wouldn't surprise me if they had half a million dollars to fit themselves out with."

"All the same, it wouldn't be an easy matter for them to obtain an armament for the yacht, in order to turn her into an armed pirate."

"My dear fellow, you know as well as I do, that in some of those South American republics you can do anything at all and no questions asked, if you happen to have the price."

"Well, where would they go? To La Guayra?"

"Possibly."

"Or Bahia; or Rio; eh?"

"There is very little use in our trying to guess where they have gone. We could not do that with any degree of certainty."

"Well, what are we to do in the meantime?" insisted Conners.

"That is precisely what I am trying to determine in my own mind, and I want your help and advice. I am addressing all of you just now."

"First tell us what you regard as the alternatives, Nick," replied Conners.

"The question is whether we shall sail into that mountain retreat, capture the men who are there, and wait quietly for the return of the *Nadja*, or if we shall remain outside at sea cruising up and down until she appears, and then try what we can do in the open.

"You must bear in mind, each of you, before you reply, that when she does return, she will probably be not only armed to the teeth, but she will be swarming with a horde of men whom Murray and the others will have collected to form their pirate crew. Are you onto all that? Each of you?"

They nodded in the affirmative.

"What is your opinion, Simmons?"

"Go inside and wait."

"And yours, Parker?"

"Go inside and wait there."

"And now yours, Conners?"

"I'm not quite ready to give mine, just yet. I want to ask a few more questions first," replied the secret service officer.

CHAPTER VII.

ANOTHER VICTIM OF THE PIRATE.

"Go ahead with your questions," said the detective, to Conners.

"How many men do you suppose there are inside of that old mountain at the present moment, Nick?" asked the secret service officer.

"As nearly as I was able to make out—fifteen," was the reply.

"What would be your method of capturing them?"

"I would suggest that we enter there with the small boats after it is dark to-night, and about the time when we would naturally suppose them to be sleeping after their labors of the day."

"Well, suppose that we should do that; suppose that we find no difficulty in overcoming them and that we capture the place with the men who are there—what would be your next move in the matter?"

"I hadn't thought quite so far as that, Conners. That would be a matter for consultation between all of us."

"But in effect, I suppose, you thought of taking the *Creeper* inside and mooring her there to await the arrival of the *Nadja;* eh?"

"Something like that; yes."

Conners shook his head in doubt.

"I don't think I quite like it that way," he said.

"Why not?"

"It seems to me that by doing that we would run the risk of disabling both vessels—and if we happened to do that, inside that mountain, we would be in a fix; don't you agree?"

"Possibly; yes."

The detective turned to Bill Spikes, to whom he had signaled to approach.

"Bill," he said, "tell us about that time you were wrecked here."

"What about it, sir?"

"How did you happen to get inside that hole in the mountain at all?"

"Sure, sir, I floated in on the top of a chicken-coop that I had in my arms when I went into the water. It was the only life-preserver I could find."

"And you were there six weeks?"

"Aye, aye, sir."

"What did you live on while you were there? What did you find to eat?"

"There was a barrel of salt horse and a case of ship buscuit floated in with me, sir. I caught fishes, too. I lived well enough."

"There is plenty of water there, I suppose?"

"Aye, aye, sir."

"Now, how did you make your escape from the place finally?"

"I built a raft, sir, and floated out of the mountain; and that same day before dark I was picked up by a whaler bound for the antarctic. She put in at Montevideo, where I went ashore and shipped from there back to New York, sir."

The detective waved the boatswain away with a gesture, and then turning to Simmons, he said.

"I wish you would tell your captain to come about and steam away from here until we decide this question."

"How will you have her headed, Nick?" asked Simmons.

"Oh; about northwest. What was the result of his observation to-day?"

"It was ten degrees eight minutes north latitude and fifty-eight degrees ten minutes and twenty seconds west longitude."

"That would make us about due east from La Guayra."

"Yes; that is what my captain said about it."

"And not far from the island of Trinidad. Tell him to head due west and to pass Trinidad to the south—if we conclude to continue on the course that far."

"You have decided not to attempt to attack the men in the mountain to-night, anyhow? Eh?" asked Conners, as Nick was turning away.

"Yes, Conners. I don't want to be precipitate about this thing; and I cannot forget that the *Creeper* does not belong to me. If she were my vessel——"

"Look here, Carter," interrupted Simmons, who had approached them, and who overheard this remark, "I want you to treat the *Creeper* and everything aboard of her exactly as if it were all your individual property. If it is your judgment that we should attack that island to-night, let's do it."

"I don't know that it is my judgment, Jim. In fact, now that I think it over, I am inclined to the opinion that it will be better to wait another day or two. There is no use in cooping ourselves up inside that mountain for an indefinite period. I don't believe that the *Nadja* will return here inside of a week; and it may be two."

"Then what is your idea of our conduct at the present time?"

"I think we will just cruise. And now, Simmons, I will go into the chart-room for awhile, and do a little studying of maps and charts, if you don't mind. I will join you on the deck again before long."

But it was a long time before the detective made his appearance again; and, when he did, the sun was just taking his last peep at them before dipping into the sea and disappearing.

And, also, just at that moment, the watch forward, sang out:

"Wreck, ho-o-o!"

"Where away?" called Nick, in reply, quickly.

"Two points off the starboard bow, sir," came the reply.

With a hasty order that the *Creeper* be headed for the wreck, Nick ran forward into the chains and brought his glass to bear upon the object that had just been discovered.

It proved to be a small steam-vessel, about a hundred feet in length, and, as Nick was viewing it through the glass, Conners and Simmons and Parker came forward and took their places beside him.

"What do you make her out to be, sir?" asked Captain Parker.

"It isn't much but a hulk just now," replied the detective. "But I think it was once a private yacht, like ourselves, only not so large. There are people on her deck, and there is a signal of distress flying."

It was almost dark when the *Creeper* hove to within a short distance of the wreck, and at once two boats were lowered into the water and put off for her. And Nick Carter was in the leading boat.

The small vessel had settled almost to her scuppers in the water, and, as the small boats approached, a group of weary-eyed men appeared at the rail, gazing half listlessly upon the approaching help.

"Ahoy, there!" cried Nick. "Who is in command aboard of you?"

"I am the owner," came an unsteady voice in reply. "For God's sake take us off as quickly as you can. I don't think we can float half an hour longer. We had given up all hope when we sighted you bearing down upon us."

"What has happened to you?" asked Nick, while the boats were being rounded up into a position where the men might be taken in safety from the yacht.

Fortunately the sea was not at all rough, and, therefore, there were few obstacles to present themselves.

"Pirates!" was the laconic reply to Nick's question.

The detective had already expected this reply; nevertheless, it was startling.

"How many are you, all told?" was the next question; and the man replied:

"Twelve, all told. That includes myself."

During the next few minutes there was no talking at all, for everybody was busily engaged in the work of rescue; but, at last, that was accomplished. The rescued men were crowded into the two boats, and they were about to pull away when Nick asked of the owner:

"I suppose there is nothing that you have left behind you that you would like to save?"

"The pirates left nothing behind them that is worth saving," was the reply.

After that there was silence until the deck of the *Creeper* was reached and the rescued men had been assisted aboard.

The owner was taken at once to the cabin, while the men were sent forward and delivered over to the care of the crew; and, as soon as the owner of the abandoned yacht had taken some nourishment and stumulant, he was asked to tell his story.

"It happened four days ago," he told them. "We couldn't have been far from where we are now, for we have been drifting ever since."

"Well?"

"It was just about an hour before sundown when we sighted a big yacht bearing down upon us, and coming at a rate of speed that suggested a government torpedo-boat."

"What color was the yacht?" asked the detective.

"She has a red hull—a fiery-red hull, sir."

"They have painted her since they stole her, then," was the detective's comment.

"Do you know the vessel?" asked the shipwrecked owner.

"Yes. We all know her. Before you continue your story I may remind you that you have forgotten to tell us your name?"

"I am John Sutherland, an Englishman."

"Thank you. Now please continue with your story."

"She bore down upon us so swiftly that we were amazed. Presently our amazement turned to fright, for it appeared as if she intended to run us down. However, she rounded to before she really did that, and then, to our utter consternation, a black flag with a skull and cross-bones was run up at her peak, and at the same time canvas coverings were stripped from three big guns on her deck."

The detective smiled.

"I strongly suspect that those were dummy guns," he said; "but, of course, you could not know that."

"No; I certainly thought them to be real. They looked so, at any rate."

"Well? What next?"

"A man leaned upon the rail and sang out to us:

"'If you offer the least resistance I will blow you out of the water!'

"I think I was too much surprised to reply; or too much amazed; or too much frightened."

"What happened then?"

"They lowered three boats into the water, and with twelve men in each of them, they boarded us."

"And was the man who hailed you from the other vessel among the boarders?"

"Yes. He was tall and dark, with a black mustache and white teeth. Quite a handsome man."

"Go on," said Nick.

"The moment he stepped aboard he demanded of me the name of my yacht. I told him her name, the *Undine*, and I also told him that she was my private property.

"'She was your private property a short time ago,' he said to me, with a sneer. 'Just now she happens to be *my* private property.'

"Well, sir, in the meantime, his men had swarmed over the sides and had driven my own men forward into the forepeak where the hatches were battened down over them and they were prisoners."

"Yes. And then——"

"Then I was ordered to stand against the mainmast, where they tied me fast with a heaving line. In the meantime, my wife and her two sisters——"

"*What!*" cried the detective. "Were there ladies aboard?"

"There were, sir. My wife and her two sisters, and a maid."

"Where are they now?" demanded Nick, with more excitement than he was usually known to exhibit.

"Now, sir, they are prisoners in the hands of the pirates—or they are dead. God only knows to what fate they have been condemned."

And so saying, he broke down completely and sobbed as if his heart were breaking.

Conners and Nick and the others stared at him in silence, and then at one another; for here was a degree of villainy which, thus far, at least, they had not once taken into consideration.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE LOOTING OF A YACHT AT SEA.

It was several moments before Mr. Sutherland recovered sufficiently to continue his story.

"You were just at the point where you were saying that the ladies came on the deck, I think," suggested the detective.

"Yes. They came to the deck, and immediately the pirate chief huddled them together, aft, and placed a guard over them. He seemed at the time to devote only a casual glance at them, and it never occurred to me

that he was thinking of making prisoners of them and taking them away."

"And then——"

"Then the looting of the ship began."

"They did it thoroughly, I suppose?"

"Thoroughly? There isn't a thing left aboard the *Undine* that is worth taking away. They removed the silver, the ornaments, the pictures, the furniture, the finishings, the carpets, and the rugs and hangings. They could not open my safe, so they moved it bodily to the deck of their own vessel, and then returned and twisted a rope around my neck and told me they would hang me unless I gave them the combination."

"Did you do it?"

"I did."

"Was there much of value in the safe?"

"About ten thousand pounds in English money, and another five thousand pounds of value in jewelry."

"What more did they do?"

"They helped themselves to all the stock of provisions and wines, leaving only barely enough to keep us alive after they had gone. We ate the last morsel of food that was left to us, this morning."

"But what happened to your yacht. She seemed to be sinking."

"She was sinking. The pirate opened the water-valves and threw one of them away so we could not recover it."

"And that was why you and your men were so exhausted, eh? You had been working to keep the yacht afloat."

"Every minute since the pirate left us. We have not had a moment's rest. You see, sir, they stove in all of our boats, so there was not a thing left to us in which we could escape from the yacht. Then they dived below, and effectually disabled our engines so that it would take a month in a shipyard to have them repaired."

"Well?"

"They must have been two or three hours in accomplishing all this; and all the time I was standing there, tied to the mast, and my wife and her sisters with the maid were grouped on the deck, aft, under guard.

"I saw them bring my things to the deck, one by one, and send them to their own vessel, and, when the last cot had gone, I saw them do something which came near to making a madman of me, then and there."

"You mean when the ladies were taken away?" asked Nick.

"Yes."

"Tell me about that, if you have the strength and the courage, sir."

"I have the strength and the courage, too. I did not suspect that they would do that; nor had it occurred to me that they would disable my engines and leave the yacht in a sinking condition."

"Well?"

"After the last load of loot had left the side of the yacht, that pirate chief went aft, accompanied by three of his officers—and, strangely enough, all four of them had the appearance of gentlemen."

"Yes. I know them all," said Nick.

"They managed somehow to group themselves behind the women. Then, at a given signal, each of them seized one of the women, pulled her arms behind her, where they were tied; and then—— Oh, my God!—then they were forced over the side into a waiting boat, and rowed away to the pirate vessel. That, sir, was the last I saw of them."

"And, then, I suppose you went mad, or supposed you did, for a time."

"I think I lost consciousness in my agony, sir. But, presently, I came to my senses again, with a realizing sense that the yacht was settling rapidly in the water.

"The strength of a giant must have been given to me at that moment, for I tore myself loose from the mast and ran to the hatch that had been fastened down.

"In a moment I had released my men.

"That is all of the story, sir. From that moment until you came to our rescue, we have labored incessantly to keep afloat, hoping almost against hope that succor would arrive. You came, and you know the rest."

"It must have been night by that time," said the detective.

"Yes; it was quite dark."

"You could, nevertheless, see the pirate as he sailed away from you, could you not?"

"Yes; for a time."

"In which direction was he headed?"

"Due west, I should say. I am quite positive of it."

"And that was four days ago?"

"Four days ago now. Yes."

"Now, tell me, Mr. Sutherland——"

"Yes?"

"While the pirates were looting your vessel there must have been a great deal of talking and shouting among them. Was there not such?"

"There was not a great deal of it. The discipline among them seemed to be very strict. The man who was the chief seemed to have an iron will, and to be no respecter of life at all. There was one thing that happened which will give you an idea about that.

"He was standing near me when one of his men passed him with a favorite oil-painting of mine—a very valuable one, too—in his arms. As he passed, he stumbled over a rope that was lying on the deck, and, as he fell, he thrust his head through the picture, ruining it."

"Of course."

"He never got upon his feet again, sir."

"What do you mean?" asked Nick.

"I mean that the pirate chief shot him dead before he

could rise; and then he coolly returned the big revolver to his belt with the remark that all could hear:

"That will teach the rest of you lubbers to be a little more careful!"

"Cadillac is a pirate, all right, Nick," said Conners. "He is going the whole hog with a vengeance, stealing women away and murdering members of his own crew."

"It is a pity," muttered Simmons, "that he didn't murder all of them."

"I want to return to the original question," said the detective, to Sutherland.

"Yes?"

"There must have been some talking among them, or among some of them, that you overheard."

"There was, of course; here and there a few words."

"Did you hear anything at all which would give you an idea of where they were bound?"

"I don't think I did, sir."

"Are you quite sure? It is very important. I may as well tell you at once that we are in these waters in search of that very pirate. The vessel he has under him belongs to me. He stole it from the harbor of New York. This vessel, here, belongs to Mr. Simmons, and we have armed her thoroughly and shipped a large crew, for the express purpose of chasing and capturing the man who robbed you."

"Heaven grant that you may succeed!" said Sutherland fervently.

"We have already discovered his retreat. We know where that is, and how to capture it when the right moment comes. But just now he is not there. He has gone to some port to fit himself out with guns and ammunition—and more men, I suppose."

"I understand."

"I have thought," continued the detective, "that La Guayra, in Venezuela, would be the likeliest port for him to seek, and for that reason——"

Sutherland interrupted him.

"Now, sir," he exclaimed, "you have given me the right cue."

"How do you mean?" asked the detective.

"By the mention of that name—La Guayra."

"Well?"

"I *did* hear one of the men say to another as they were passing me, 'When we get to La Guayra there won't but a few of us get shore-leave, for——' That was all I heard. They passed beyond my hearing, then."

"You are sure about having heard that much, are you?"

"Yes; positive. It had quite escaped my memory until your mention of the name of the place brought it back to mind again, however."

"The only astonishing feature about the whole affair, to me," remarked Nick musingly, after a considerable pause, "is that they left you alive at all. It is a wonder to me that they did not butcher you and your men then and there."

Sutherland shrugged his shoulders.

"There was some talk about doing it," he said. "The man who acted as chief over them all was for doing it, but one of the others objected."

"Which one was that?" asked Nick.

"A short, spare man with a smooth-shaven face."

"Murray. I know him. What was said about it?"

"I heard the chief say to the other man—they were standing not far from me at the time:

"'Do you wish to do the thing up brown and make these men walk the plank, as they used to do in the good old days?'

"The other man replied that he did not.

"'Well, we can't leave them alive, to tell all they know when they are rescued,' said the chief.

"'Then scuttle the ship and destroy their boats. Leave them to sink after we have gone, if you want to, but I haven't got to the point yet where I can stand idly by and watch a man drown.'

"I really think, Mr. Carter, that they thought we would founder inside of two or three hours—before another day, in fact."

"And it was only through your own heroic efforts that you managed to keep afloat."

"I think so."

"How many man should you say that the pirate had aboard his vessel?" asked Nick.

"I can only guess at it, Mr. Carter."

"Do that, then."

"He brought thirty men to my yacht. I should say that there were about, or nearly, as many more men who were watching us from the pirate craft."

"Sixty men? That would make a big crew for the *Nadja*," mused Nick, aloud.

"What did you say was the name of the pirate vessel?" asked Sutherland.

"She was the *Nadja* before she was stolen," replied Nick.

"Then they have found occasion to change her name, for when she drifted around I could plainly read the name that was painted on her stern."

"What was it?"

"The *Revenge*."

"Humph!" said the detective grimly; and then he turned to Simmons.

"Jim," he said, "I have decided what we will do."

"Well? What is it, Nick?"

"We will head directly for La Guayra. It is more than likely that we will find more victims in the path of the pirate, and our first duty would seem to be to look for such. After that, we will find an opportunity to tackle that island—and, ultimately, the *Nadja*—or the *Revenge*, as she is named for the present."

CHAPTER IX.

THE TIME FOR THE NIGHT ATTACK.

The following three days were entirely uneventful.

During that time they sighted only two vessels, and they were fruit-steamers bound for the North.

At the end of the third day the detective called his friends into the cabin and said to them:

"I think it is time now that we altered our course. We can accomplish nothing more by continuing on in this direction. I have only come this far because it occurred to me that there might be other victims of the pirate along his course, to rescue. As it is, now that we have found none, I think we had better return."

"To the island?" asked Conners.

"Yes."

"And attack it?"

"Yes."

"I'm with you there. It is what I believed we should have done in the first place."

"If we had done that," replied the detective quietly, "we would have left Mr. Sutherland and the crew of his yacht to perish miserably."

"That is true enough, Nick. I am glad we didn't, then."

"But we are agreed that it is the best thing to do now—to return?"

"I vote for it," replied Conners.

"And I," said Simmons.

"What do you say, Parker?" asked Nick.

"I am under your orders, sir," was the reply.

"What suggestion have you to make, Mr. Sutherland?" asked the detective, next.

"Do I have a voice in the matter, gentlemen?"

"You certainly do. You have much more at stake than we have."

Sutherland smiled sadly.

"Of course," he said, "there is not a moment in the day when I am not thinking of my wife and her sisters and their probable fate. I will confess that I have some hope that they may not have been injured; but it is a very faint hope, gentlemen."

"Still," said the detective, "there are some logical grounds for it. The very fact that the pirate was bound for a port where he would have to lie very quiet and keep everything concerning him in the dark, would suggest that he may have deferred whatever devilishness he had in mind concerning the women, until he should have them safely back at his island retreat."

"That is the manner in which I have thought it out, Mr. Carter."

"For that reason there are grounds for the belief that they are still uninjured—and, if that is true, they are likely to remain unharmed until they are taken to the island."

"I am hoping and praying for that, sir," murmured Sutherland.

"And, in that case, if we accept that as true, it is up to us to get to that island before they do, and to be there to receive them when they return."

"I think so, Mr. Carter."

"Then, Simmons, if you will give the necessary order, we will put back for Fire Island at once."

"Full speed ahead, sir?" asked Parker.

"Yes. You may take the order to the deck. Full speed ahead and a bee-line for Fire Island. We should arrive there about dark to-morrow night."

"About sundown, sir."

"Very well. We won't hesitate any longer after we arrive there. We will attack at once. We will capture the men who are there, and we will lie in wait for the arrival of the pirate."

* * * * * * *

The time was calculated to a nicety.

The sun was still half an hour high above the horizon when Fire Island was sighted, looming out of the water like an obelisk, and the yacht was at once slowed down until she was making only half headway, so that when she did arrive at the very point where she had waited while the detective was rowed around to the hole in the mountain on that previous visit, it was just on the edge of night.

Then it was that the detective called Bill Spikes aft again.

"Bill," he said, "can you take the *Creeper* through the reefs in this light?"

"Aye, aye, sir. As well as in the day."

"Go forward, then, and do it. How much speed do you want?"

"Just good steerage way, sir. No more. There is a sharp turn after we pass the first reef, but after that it is easy sailing."

"Which is the best entrance through the reefs? This one, or the one on the south side of the mountain?"

"This one, sir."

"All right. Take her through at once."

"It is a risk," he added to the other, after Bill had gone away, "but now is the time when we must take risks."

But Bill Spikes proved himself an efficient pilot.

He took his place forward in the extreme point of the bow, and from there, with his voice, and with gestures, he made the man at the wheel understand perfectly what was required.

The big yacht wound her way sinuously around the coral rocks, thence through the channel between the two reefs to the second opening; and thence again, after another rather sharp turn, she floated safely inside of all the dangers, with plenty of room to spare for all the maneuvering that might be required of her.

"How much of a stretch of water is there between the mountain and the reefs, around there on the opposite side?" asked the detective, of Spikes.

"A good half-mile, or more, sir," was the reply.

"Take the yacht around there, then. Stop her before you get to the hole,"

"Aye, aye, sir. May I ask a question?"

"Yes. What is it?"

"Do you intend to sail directly inside of the mountain, or——"

"No; I do not intend that. What I do intend is to lay to as close to the hole as we can hold the yacht in safety, and then to make the attack in the small boats."

"And I am to go with you, sir?"

"Not by any manner of means, Bill."

"Why, not, sir?"

"Because we cannot afford to have you run any risks. You are our pilot. You will have to remain where you will keep a whole skin on your body in order to be prepared to take the *Creeper* out of here when we are ready to go."

"All the same, sir, I would like to——"

"I haven't the least doubt of it; but you cannot. That settles it."

It was not a long time after that when the vessel came to a stop, and then the boats were made ready for the expedition.

The moon was shining brightly, rendering the surrounding waters almost as light as in the day; but Nick knew that the darkness would be inky in its blackness, inside that mountain.

They had five boats altogether, and each boat accommodated—that is they averaged—eight men, so when they at last embarked there were forty who were in readiness for the venture.

But these arrangements had been made while Nick was below, and upon returning to the deck he changed it all.

"We will take four boats," he said, "and we will take five men in each boat. That will be twenty, all told, and that will be sufficient for this expedition."

So he selected the twenty men, and, with Conners in command of two of the boats and the remaining two under his own direction, they set out.

The time was still early in the evening, and Nick had no doubt that there would be fires burning, and lights showing from the shore inside the mountain, to direct them when once they had passed the entrance—and in this he was not mistaken.

Two fires could be seen, blazing brightly, and here and there, in addition to these, there were lights that winked at them through the darkness.

Darkness?

Did you ever encounter black darkness—darkness in which *nothing* is visible?

This was just such black darkness as that, as soon as they had passed through the entrance and were well inside of that strange retreat.

The detective could not see the oarsmen in his own boat.

He lifted one hand and held it in front of his eyes, and could not see it.

There was nothing, absolutely nothing visible, save the fires and the lights on the shore, and a patch of sky and stars which could be seen through the crater at the summit of the mountain.

The oarlocks had been muffled, of course, and, as they went forward slowly, there was not a sound to indicate that human presence was there.

They entered the cavernous place with Nick's boat in the lead, with the one under his direct command following that, and then in turn came the two boats under the direction of Conners.

But the detective had not anticipated the fact that once they were inside, it would be absolutely impossible for the occupants of one boat to know aught of the location of any of the others, and he did not dare to call out to his companions in the venture, for the reason that in that cavernous place sounds would travel to almost any distance.

Have you ever stood under the dome of the capitol at Washington, at one side of it, and spoken in a natural voice to some person who was directly opposite you at the other side of the dome?

It is one of the mysteries of accoustics that your voice will be perfectly audible to that person who is all the way across the dome from you, while another individual who might be standing directly between you, in the center of the dome, would not hear a word.

The detective feared that something of this sort might happen here, if a sound were made.

He feared that if a word were uttered, it might travel around those interior walls of the domelike mountain, and apprise the men on the shore of the fact that strangers were approaching.

But, if they could not see one another, all could see the gleaming fires and the twinkling lights on the shore ahead of them; and all made directly for that goal.

They proceeded very slowly, of course.

Caution was the great thing in an attack of this kind, and by the exercise of caution only could they hope to be entirely successful.

Before leaving the *Creeper*, the detective had directed Bill Spikes to draw, with a pencil, a rude plan of the outline of that shore, and now Nick knew fairly well the shape of it.

Spikes had also given his opinion as to the best place to make their landing, and Conners had been directed

to make for it, and to land as near it as he could in the darkness.

From the information obtained on the occasion of his first visit, Nick had a fairly good idea as to the location of the fires he now saw, and from that he calculated just about where he should look for the landing-place.

And so they went on forward, silently as shadows, stealthy as cats, and as implacable as men can be who have a severe duty to perform, and who have decided to accomplish it at all hazards.

And after a long row, by the light of the fires reflected upon the small trees and on the water, they could discern the outlines of the shore.

And Nick's boat, being between the others and the fires, was visible to his own men in the other boats; so, when he turned abruptly to the right, and skirted the shore in search of the point where he had decided to land, they followed him without any difficulty.

At last he saw the place that had been indicated by Bill Spikes, and he turned the boat's head toward it.

Then she grounded gently on the beach, and the detective leaped out quickly, followed by the others.

Then the three remaining boats arrived, and the time for the night attack was at hand.

CHAPTER X.

IN THE PIRATE'S LAIR.

The lumber-schooner, of which mention has been made before, had provided the men on the cavernous shore with all the material they required for their purposes, and already they had erected half a dozen small houses—or, more properly speaking, shelters.

There was, in truth, only one house which might be called such, and this, Nick Carter had no doubt, was intended for the occupancy of the chieftains of the pirate horde.

Now, as the detective and his men stood upon the beach, looking toward the weird scene with which they were confronted, the firelight revealed everything to them with a distinctness that is hardly believable.

But it must be remembered that they had been a long time in utter darknes; that their eyes had become accustomed to the blackness, and that now, where there was a particle of light its effect upon their optic nerves was increased a hundredfold.

The fires that they had seen from the boats were only two in number, but they were blazing brightly.

Between the attacking party and these fires, forms could be seen as they passed to and fro at frequent intervals.

Again, near one of the fires, a group of men were engaged in some sort of a game of cards, while others were looking on, and now and then offering a wager on a result.

Voices came to Nick Carter's ears distinctly, as the men talked, and they had a strange, hollow sound in that cavernous place, too.

"Conners," he whispered, to his friend, "I wish you to take nine of the men—those who are with you—and make a long detour which will bring you safely and without noise to a point directly opposite where we now stand. Do you think you can accomplish that, on ground you never saw before, without being discovered?"

"Certainly, I can."

"Very well, do it. Strike a match under your coat now, and look at your watch."

"All right."

"What time is it?"

"Half-past nine o'clock, exactly."

"Very good. When your watch tells you that it is half-past ten I want you to rush forward to the attack from the other side."

"And you will do the same from this side, at the same moment?"

"Precisely."

"Why wait so long, Nick?"

"Because I wish to give you ample time to get into position."

"I ought to do it in less than an hour."

"You don't know positively about that. You don't know what you will encounter. It may take you all of an hour to get around there."

"All right. I suppose, too, that some of those fellows will have turned in by that time."

"Probably."

"What sort of an attack do you want to make, Nick?"

"An attack that will win, Roger."

"I know that; but do you think we had better shoot to kill?"

"No; not at first. Not unless it is absolutely necessary. I wish to take as many of them alive as we can."

"If we don't scare them to death at the first attack, I think we might get them all," said Conners, with a grin.

"Yes," agreed Nick; "but the only trouble is that they are not the sort of men who are easily scared; and, if they are frightened at first, their fright will not last long. They will recover themselves, and they will fight, too."

"I suppose you will make your attack in a direct line from where we are standing now; eh, Nick?"

"Yes; and you will make yours from behind that small building that is farthest from us, over there. See it?"

"Yes."

"Now, get along. Remember—at exactly half-past ten you are to make your rush."

"I'll do it."

"Shoot in the air, over their heads. Tell your men how to do it. Otherwise you may send one of your bullets into one of us."

"All right."

They parted, then, and in a moment more, Conners, followed by his nine men, had disappeared in the darkness.

Then began a long period of waiting for the detective, for he had considered it wise to adopt that full-hour plan in order that there might be no hitch in the proceedings.

An hour, he argued, would give ample time, not only to reach the place opposite, but to prepare at leisure for the rush that was to follow it.

The four boats were now hauled up safely on the shore, so they could not get away, and then the detective went to his men one by one and directed each one separately what to do when the moment of the attack was at hand.

Then, telling them to remain where they were and to keep silent, he crept forward stealthily toward the fires, to reconnoiter, and to overhear all that he could of the conversations among the pirates.

There were no twigs on the ground to crack beneath his weight. There was nothing there at all which rendered his forward progress difficult, and he had soon obtained an advantageous position where he was practically in the midst of them without being near enough to incur unnecessary danger of discovery.

And almost at once he heard scraps of conversations which made him glad that he was there.

One of them was this:

"I say, you, Pete, didn't the ole man tell you, afore he went away, that if you hit any more o' that booze, he'd let daylight through you when he made port here again?"

"Well, he ain't back here yet, is he?"

"He will be in another forty-eight hours."

"He won't be here as soon as that."

"Aye, aye; he will that. That was the time he set. The day after to-morrow, along about sundown."

"Well, I'll take good care that he don't see any signs o' grog on me by that time."

"Maybe somebody'll pipe on you, Pete."

"Then somebody had better look out. If anybody pipes on *me*, I'll slit his wizzen for him; you hear me?"

And another conversation overheard by the detective, was this:

"I ain't got much faith in his gettin' all them guns and the rest of the outfit; have you, Tarpail?"

"Aye, aye, that I have, Fingers. He's a rare one, is Cap'n Cadillac. More'n that, he knows somebody at La Guayra, or Caracas, who can git them fur him. He knows what he's about. You leave him alone."

"Do you know how many guns there were that he was after?"

"Six. Two big ones, and four rapids."

"And you'll be chief gunner, I s'pose."

"That's what he said to me. Aye, aye, Fingers. Maybe you want to be gunner's mate; eh?"

"Yep, Tarpail, I do."

"Well, we'll ax the cap'n. I'll recommend you."

Still another conversation was this:

"He said as how he would pick up anything that fell in his way, goin' 'r comin', and that if we'd stay here quietlike and obey orders, we'd git our share jest the same as if we was aboard the *Revenge* with him."

"He couldn't pick up much, goin', cos he didn't have no guns."

"He wouldn't need 'em. And, besides, he had dummies."

"Ho! ho! ho! Dummies! What good are them?"

"They'd scare the life outen an ordinary man, these days, if the flag didn't do it afore the dummy guns was seen. I heer'd him say another thing, too."

"What was that?"

"I heer'd him a-tellin' Cap'n Murray that he knowed all about a yacht that was a-cruisin' about in these here waters, and that if he could only pick her up, he'd make a nice haul. The *Undine*, he said her name was."

"How'd he know about her, hey? And where to find her, I'd like to know?"

"I dunno. Some woman told him about it in a letter. Some woman who's sister's hubby owns the craft. I guess she was an old spark of his'n, when he was doin' the respectable act."

"Say, McGlory, what do ye think about that outfit of ourn, anyhow?"

"What outfit? What are ye talkin' about?"

"Well, twixt you an' me, this is the fust time in my life that I ever set sail under four captains to onct."

"Oh, rats! There ain't no four captings. There's only one. The others don't cut no figgerheads on the *Revenge*."

"Well, there's Murray, and there's Russel, and there's Hadley, besides the real cap'n; and that ain't saying nothin' about Marston. Five captains, by gosh!"

"You wait and see. There ain't no more than one cap'n; I tell you that, and I know. Them others'll git too fresh someday."

"And then what'll happen? Hey?"

"There'll be some vacant berths in the cabin. Cadillac ain't no fool. He's a wise guy, and he'll know how to trim ship when the time comes to do it."

"Do you mean to say that he'll git rid of the others?"

"I does. That's what he'll do."

"How? Chuck 'em overboard?"

"Yes; or maroon 'em; or put 'em where the authorities'll git 'em."

The detective worked his way along to close proximity to another group, and here he overheard this:

"I tell you I heard 'em talking, and I know I'm right."

'It ain't sense. We're sailors; we ain't no land pirates, 'r burglars."

"All the same, there ain't nothin' to hinder us from goin' ashore and crackin' a good safe crib like that one at San Fernando, on the island of Trinidad; especially when you know beforehand that there's a million dollars at least in that there bank."

"They'd put up a fight for it, wouldn't they?"

"They would if they happened to know that we was a-comin'; but they wouldn't know nothin' about that, and it would be all over before they could get their breath."

"I'd ruther do my fightin' at sea, I would."

"Oh, you're a croaker. You allers was. That ain't the only bank, either, that he's got in his eye. There's more of 'em around on the other coast, and as soon as he makes this locality too hot to hold us, he's goin' around there. There ain't nothin' that can ketch the *Revenge*. You know that."

"I've heer'd you say it."

"Well, I heard 'em. Them's their plans. They're going to go ashore wherever there is a good chanct, and do their piratin' there. It pays better—and we get our shares jest the same."

"Whether we help do the fightin' 'r not?"

"Sure. That's one of the rules. Maybe you ain't read the rules."

"No; I saw 'em; but I can't read, and you know it."

"Come along o' me and I'll read 'em to you."

The detective looked at his watch. He could see the dial by the firelight, which was not far away from him.

It was a quarter-past ten, and he silently began to withdraw from the scene.

In fifteen minutes more that rush was to be made, and he did not want Conners to get in ahead of him. It was necessary for their plans that the attack should be made from both sides at once.

CHAPTER XI.

A MASTERPIECE OF STRATEGY.

"Half-past ten!"

The detective closed his watch with a snap, and returned it to his pocket.

Then, turning to his men, he gave the order in a low tone, for them to follow him.

For a considerable distance they advanced deliberately, for Nick preferred that the first noise of the attack should proceed from Conners' division.

And it did.

With his own men Nick had just reached a point from which it would be easy to make a sudden dash forward, when the atmosphere inside the cavern seemed to be suddenly rent asunder by yelling and shouting, which sounded as if it came from the throats of a hundred men; and by the continuous and incessant reports of firearms.

Instantly he gave the necessary order to his own men, and they followed the example set by Conners with such a good-will that it seemed as if the world had suddenly gone mad, and was venting its fury inside that hollow mountain.

Nothing can adequately describe the effect of it all.

The report of a single firearm would have been increased in volume of sound tenfold, and it would have echoed and reechoed through that hollow chamber until it alone would have given the impression of a hundred reports.

What, then, was the effect of the incessant firing of twenty revolvers in such a place?

It can much better be imagined than described; but even the imagination falls prostrate in the face of such a chaotic mass of sound.

Add to that the shouting and yelling of twenty full-grown men.

Think of the reverberating echoes that roared from one side of the cavern to the other until it was utterly impossible to locate a single sound—until it seemed as if the noises came from everywhere at once.

And, then, try to imagine the effect of it all upon those fifteen men who had been so quietly enjoying their cards and their gossip up to that moment.

When the noises first startled them, they leaped to their feet in terror.

Some of them reached for their firearms, only to discover that they had laid them aside for the sake of comfort and in a sense of perfect security.

Others started to run; they knew not whither, if only they could escape that din of noises and the bullets which they believed were whistling past their heads.

Still others fell prone upon their faces, bewildered and frightened into a half paralysis.

Some leaped into the water, only to swim out again. Some fell upon their knees, with clasped hands.

Not one among them all thought of resisting this mysterious attack.

Some there were who believed that the *Revenge* had suddenly returned, and that their own campanions had fallen upon them to slay and kill.

All succumbed to the terror of the moment!

When Nick Carter walked over to one of the fires a few moments later, and, pulling his watch from his pocket, glanced at the dial, he turned to Conners with a smile, and said:

"Ten-forty-five, Conners. That was quick work, wasn't it?"

"Rather; and it was warm work while it lasted."

"It is a wonder that some of them didn't drop dead from sheer fright," laughed the detective. "I think I would have been paralyzed with fear myself, had I been one of them."

"Did you ever hear such an infernal racket in your life?" asked Conners.

"I never did."

"I was almost scared myself," continued Conners. "I thought for a minute that we were also attacked."

Fifteen men, bound hand and foot, were stretched upon the ground, gazing at their captors as if they regarded them as directly from the infernal regions.

"Your career of piracy was short lived," said Nick, to one of them.

"Who the devil are you, anyhow?" was the genteel reply, and Nick turned away with a shrug, and without deigning any answer to this direct question.

"There is sufficient wood here to make a big fire," said the detective to his men. "While some of you do that, I want four or five of you to take one of the boats and go back to the yacht. I think, Conners, that possibly you had better go with them."

"All right, Nick. Whatever you say."

"Just get aboard as soon as possible and tell Bill Spikes to bring the *Creeper* inside, and to anchor her just as close inshore here as it is possible."

In a short time after that, there was a fire blazing there which sent out its light far and wide, and within an hour from the time that the one-sided fight was over, the search-light of the *Creeper* shot its stream of illumination upon them from the entrance.

"There she comes," said the detective to his men; and then they stood on the beach and watched the yacht as she came gracefully forward until at last her anchor was dropped within fifty feet of where they were standing.

"The *Nadja* is due here about sundown the day after to-morrow," Nick told his friends, as soon as he was in the cabin with them. "I heard that much while I was eavesdropping before we made the attack."

"If she doesn't get here sooner," said Captain Parker laconically. "I think it would be a heap site safer for us to look for her back at almost any minute."

"I wish there was a way of getting up to the top of that crater," said Nick, gazing aloft at the patch of sky through the top of the mountain.

"I'm sure that I don't want to climb any two thousand feet into the air," remarked Simmons. "What's the matter with placing a watch outside in one or two of the small boats? They ought to be able to sight her soon enough for our purposes, provided that we go at once about our preparations for her reception."

And this was done.

Three boats instead of two were sent out at once, each with three men in it; and they were directed to form a triangle around the mountain so that they would be in view of one another all the time.

There were to be three shifts of them, with eight hours on and eight hours off until the pirate should appear.

After that was done, and the prisoners had been disposed of by being safely ironed with manacles, which had been brought out with the *Creeper* for that very purpose, everybody save the regular watch for that hour turned in and slept.

But they were astir again early in the morning, and then began the actual work of preparing for the reception of the pirate vessel when it should return.

"If it weren't for the fact that we are about as anxious to save the *Nadja* as we are to capture the pirates, it would be a dead easy proposition to blow her up," remarked Conners.

"I want to capture her, and the men aboard of her, just as we got these fellows here, if it is a possible thing to do it," said the detective, in reply.

"Without firing a shot, eh?"

"Yes; if possible."

"Well, I don't believe that we can scare them as we scared these fellows. Do you?"

"I don't know," said Nick. "We might try. Something suggests itself to me, if we could only carry it out. Take a walk over to that building, which they have evidently erected for a storehouse, Conners, and see if you get the same idea that I did."

Conners did as Nick suggested, and presently he returned.

"What did you find?" asked the detective.

"Why, I found a lot of truck, provisions and what not. I should think that might be the stuff that was captured from that schooner we picked up off Porto Rico, on our way down here. It looks like it."

"It is, without a doubt. Did you notice all those rolls of red bunting?"

"Sure I did. They don't manufacture that in Mexico, do they?"

"No. It is probably some that the captain of the schooner took down there with him to trade, and, not being able to dispose of it, he was taking it back to New York again. How much is there of it, should you say, Conners?"

"Heaven only knows. There are about fifty rolls, I should say."

"Enough to make an impromptu suit of clothes for all of us?"

"Eh? What are you driving at?"

"This: There is enough of that red bunting to wind us all up in, isn't there?"

"Say, Nick, did you get sunstruck yesterday?"

"Not quite. Listen."

"I'm all attention."

"It is rather warm in here. We won't need all our clothing. I propose that we prepare a strip of that red bunting for each and every man, with the exception of ourselves."

"All of the men, you mean?"

"Yes. The *Nadja* will be sighted when she is a good way off, and there will be time after that for everybody to get into his rig; and he will do that by having others wind his strip around him from his head to his heels. Don't you see?"

"Faith, I do not—yet."

"The effect will be that each man will appear as if he were dressed in red tights. Then a band of it can be tied around each man's head, in the shape of a turban, and another around the waist for a belt in which to carry their extra arms. I think that will make them look sufficiently fiendish, don't you?"

Conners laughed long and loud.

"It's a good one," he said. "Almost as good as that other idea of Parker's when we captured the smugglers, pretending to be pirates ourselves."

"You see the point now?"

"Of course I do. Only there is this to say about it."

"Well?"

"You are figuring to scare the men aboard the *Nadja* —or the *Revenge*, as they call her now—out of their seven wits, by making them think that this cavern is the main entrance to the infernal regions, and that we are a lot of devils who have come out to have a lark with them, aren't you?"

"That is the idea precisely."

"Well, the thing I was going to say is that that's all right, so far as the men go; but I don't believe that Cadillac or Murray, or any of that bunch will scare worth a cent."

"I don't care whether they scare or not, so long as we can frighten their men into offering no resistance until we have succeeded in getting the upper hand. Simmons has got plenty of red and green fire in his stores. Eh, Simmons?"

"Any quantity of it, Nick," replied Simmons, joining them.

"Then," said Nick, "the rest of my plan is this: We will set to work right away, constructing rafts to hold us. When they are made, we will take them to the entrance to this place, and moor them fast to the rocks just inside.

"Those rafts will be for our use, and there will be a large one on either side of the entrance.

"Directly in front of the entrance, we will place a small raft, upon which we will erect a solid-looking platform, and on the top of that platform I will heap up enough red fire to burn an hour.

"On each of the big rafts we will have heaps of red fire, and of green fire as well, and we will arrange our men so they will be equally divided between the two rafts.

"We can easily rig a lot of grappling-hooks, and these, with cleats on the rafts, will be all that is required.

"*Then*, when the *Nadja* pokes her nose through that hole in the wall out there, we will wait until she is just the right distance inside to suit us, when one of the men detailed for the purpose will touch off the red fire on the small raft. That will cause the engines of the *Nadja* to be reversed at once. Then we will shove forward our other two rafts, and they will not even see us do it, for their entire attention will be fixed on that small raft. We will all be dressed in red, like so many devils, and we

will swarm over the sides and be upon them before they know it. If those sailors, and all the crew of the pirate, do not fall down in a trance, I miss my guess. At all events, the thing will give us an easy victory—and I do want to make the capture without bloodshed, if possible."

CHAPTER XII.

A HORDE OF IMPS FROM INFERNO.

In reality, three full days elapsed before the *Nadja* was sighted, approaching the island from the westward, and thus the detective and his followers had ample time in which to make all their preparations.

Sailors are natural tailors, and in the manufacture of the suits of red, they demonstrated an ingenuity and a skill that Nick Carter had not suspected.

Moreover, they entered into the spirit of the adventure heartily, so that they used their very best efforts in doing all that they could do in the way of contributing to its success.

The three rafts were constructed rapidly, too; the two large ones, and the small one, which was to compel the approaching vessel to come to a stop at the right moment.

One man was to remain aboard this small raft, and at a signal from the detective was to ignite the red fire; then he was to dive into the water and swim to join his companions.

Aboard each of the large rafts which were moored at either side of the entrance to the cavern, were other red and green fires, and also on each of them was a rapid-fire gun, taken from the deck of the *Creeper* in order to be ready at hand if they should be needed.

It was approaching nightfall when the *Nadja* was sighted, and this, too, worked to the advantage of the detective's party, for Nick wished it to be dark inside the cavern when the pirates arrived on the scene.

As soon as the report was made, everything was bustle and hurry inside the hollow mountain. But the men had been already trained.

Each one knew his place and exactly what to do, so there was no confusion, but everything went forward with the precision of mechanism.

The sun went down while yet the yacht was outside the reefs, and by the time she had made her way through them and was approaching the entrance to the mountain, it was quite dark.

On board each of the large rafts were crouched, waiting, thirty men in red, and every one of these sixty men had manufactured for himself a pair of imitation horns, by twisting a pair of lengths of the bunting into the required shape, and rendering it stiff with wire.

Nick Carter and his immediate friends had contented themselves by having sewed upon their clothing stripes of the red, which sufficed well enough for their purposes.

And, then, as the *Nadja* approached the entrance, they waited there in utter darkness for the moment of surprise.

It came at last.

The yacht poked her nose slowly—very slowly, through the opening in the rocks.

She crept forward, inch by inch, as if almost afraid of her way, until her entire length was inside the hollow mountain—and then Nick Carter imitated the hooting of an owl.

Instantly a flash of red shot up from the small raft directly in the path of the yacht; and it grew in volume until the whole inside of the cavern seemed to have taken fire.

The man upon the raft, who had lighted the fire, slipped off unseen into the water behind it, and at the same instant the men on the big rafts began to work their way forward toward the sides of the vessel.

From the decks of the *Nadja* came shouts and curses.

Hasty orders were given. Bells in the engine-room rang out loudly. There was a rush of feet along her decks. There were some curses; and then——

It seemed as if the vessel itself was enveloped in fire.

Great streams of red, and dense columns of blood-red smoke shot up from one side of her; on the opposite side it was the same, with the exception that the color was green.

The whole effect was terrifying—paralyzing—*awful!*

And, then, to add to the horror of the scene, swarms of demons in red, with horns growing upon their heads, leaped over the sides of the vessel upon her decks and began a vigorous attack with fists and clubs upon the terror-stricken men who formed the crew of the pirate.

They never thought of resisting.

It was all too terrible for that.

They shrieked in terror. They ran hither and thither, in their efforts to escape this swarm of devils who had suddenly appeared from the infernal regions to devour them.

Some of them fell upon their knees to pray, thinking that that would drive out the minions and the imps of Satan.

Some of them ran to the sides of the vessel and sought to leap into the water; many of them did jump from bow and stern, and there is no doubt that many of them were drowned.

Some of them dived below hatches and sought the uttermost depths of the hold in which to hide.

Not one of them thought of picking up an arm or a weapon, and attempting to make a fight for it. They were much too terror-stricken for that.

And those imitation devils played among them as a cat might play among mice. They knocked them down by dozens, and, as each one fell, irons were clapped on his wrists and ankles so that he could not get up again; and if there was time, he was picked up bodily and heaved over the side, presumably into the water, but really upon the rafts that were lashed there.

All this time—and it was happening too rapidly to permit the relator to give any adequate idea of that part of it—the officers of the vessel were vainly endeavoring to restore order.

Cadillac was shouting, and cursing, and gesticulating.

Murray, and Russel, and the others were doing the same, but all this had no more effect upon the thoroughly frightened men than water on a duck's back.

Their voices were not even heard, or, if here and there one of the crew heard them, he paid not the slightest heed.

And, in the meantime, Nick, followed by Conners, Simmons, Parker, and Sutherland, dashed their way through the throng.

It had been arranged beforehand whom each one of them should attack.

Nick had selected Cadillac for his own special prey. He had apportioned Hadley to Conners, Simmons was to take care of Russel, Parker was to attack Marston, and Sutherland was to make as short work as possible of Murray.

Had the whole thing been arranged with automatic figures and set to clockwork, it could not have gone forward with more perfect regularity.

Nick Carter dashed through the crowd as soon as he was able to do so, and in a moment found himself face to face with Cadillac.

The surprise of that man cannot be described.

He recognized the detective instantly, and yet he had no opportunity to express that surprise, for instantly the detective leaped upon him and seized him in that relentless grip of his which there is no escaping.

Cadillac struggled for a moment, but he was no match for the detective.

In an instant he was lifted from his feet, and raised high in the air; and then he was dashed down upon the deck with a sickening thud which sounded above the other noises of the strange battle.

He was stunned and senseless, too, when he fell, and the detective quickly served him as the other captives were being served; that is, he put the irons on him in a twinkling, and left him there to come to his senses as he might.

He turned, then, in time to hit Hadley a blow under the ear, and thus help Conners, and then he performed the same service for Marston, with whom Parker was just getting the worst of it.

Simmons had already conquered Russel, and Murray was stretched senseless upon the deck where the fist of the Englishman, Sutherland, had laid him.

Sutherland himself was nowhere to be seen, and the detective correctly supposed that he had gone in search of his wife and the other women who had been made captives by the pirate chieftain and his crew.

For one instant the detective turned and looked back along the deck; and, in that hasty glance, he saw that the fight—if fight it could be called—was about over.

Here and there there was an individual case of combat between two who happened to be about equally matched; but even that part of it was rapidly subsiding.

And now, also, the big search-light from the *Creeper* found them all out and brilliantly illuminated the entire scene again, for the red and green fire had been dying out.

Then the detective turned and ran hastily into the cabin in order to assist Sutherland, if assistance should be necessary.

He found him there.

He was standing in the middle of the cabin floor, and he held a woman tightly in his arms, pressing her closely against him in the rapture of their reunion; and, grouped around both, wringing their hands and sobbing for very joy, were Mrs. Sutherland's two sisters and their maid.

It was a scene which the detective never forgot.

He paused at the door, uncertain whether to advance or to retreat, but Sutherland, turning his head a little, saw him, and instantly he stepped back away from his wife, and, pointing toward the detective, cried out:

"There is the man, sweetheart, who saved me and who has now saved you. That is Nick Carter, the bravest and the best fellow on top of the earth!"

Instantly Mrs. Sutherland ran to the detective. She seized one of his hands and kissed it rapturously; and at once her example was followed by the others—by her two sisters and even the maid, while Nick stood there, not knowing what to do, and wishing with all his heart that he were at that moment back again in New York, or, in fact, almost anywhere save in that one place where he found himself.

Finally he managed to free himself, and, as he stepped back, he said:

"Ladies, if you will assure me that you are unharmed, that is all I ask of you."

And when he had received the assurance, made with more protestations of thanks, he bowed himself out of the cabin.

* * * * * * *

And now, my friends, if some day one or more among you should care to go down to the Erie Basin and make inquiries, you will be likely to find moored there—unless they happen to be at sea—the good yacht *Nadja*, restored to her natural color, and none the worse for her baptism of piracy, and, also, the good yacht *Creeper*, which served so well in her restoration to her owner, Nick Carter.

THE END.

The next issue, No. 499, will contain "A Clue From the Clouds; or, Nick Carter's Mysterious Evidence." Ready next week.

ABOUT THE EARLY NUMBERS OF THE

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We receive hundreds of letters every week from readers asking if we can supply the early numbers of Tip Top containing Frank's adventures. In every case we are obliged to reply that numbers 1 to 200 are entirely out of print. We would like to call the attention of our readers to the fact that the Frank Merriwell Stories now being published in book form in the Medal Library are inclusive of these early numbers. The first book to appear was No. 150 entitled "Frank Merriwell's Schooldays." We give herewith a complete list of all stories that have been published in book form up to the time of writing. We will be glad to send a fine colored catalogue of the Medal Library which is just filled with good things for boys, upon receipt of a one-cent stamp to cover postage.

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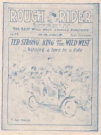
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